

New Worlds and the Italian Renaissance

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New Worlds and the Italian Renaissance

Contributions to the History
of European Intellectual Culture

Edited by

Andrea Moudarres and Christiana Purdy Moudarres



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INTRODUCTION

This volume aims to assess the longstanding debate over the role played by the Italian Renaissance in the intellectual history of European culture. It originates from *Foundations of Modernity: A Graduate Symposium on the Italian Renaissance*, held April 3–5, 2009, at Yale University, and most of the essays included here are revised and expanded versions of papers presented at this conference. The authors engage in an interpretative conversation with thinkers such as Jacob Burckhardt, Ernst Cassirer, Eugenio Garin, Paul Oskar Kristeller, whose works have oriented the search for the roots of modernity and for the significance of Renaissance Humanism. The studies presented in this collection contribute to this effort from various perspectives: scientific, theological, political, and literary. The sections into which the volume is divided reflect the breadth and interdisciplinarity of this project.

The core of the ideas that we offer can be geographically and chronologically identified in fifteenth-century Italy. Indeed, most of the contributors characterize Florentine Humanism as the epicenter of an intellectual quake whose waves spread across Europe, through the Mediterranean, and beyond the Pillars of Hercules. Together, these essays offer a wide range of viewpoints on the re-invention of classical and medieval themes, and a nuanced investigation of how these encounters affected the trajectories of religious, historical, and artistic discourses. They explore the reverberations of Christopher Columbus's voyage in sixteenth-century epic poems, assess the influence of Poggio Bracciolini, Leonardo da Vinci, and Niccolò Machiavelli in redefining the vision of modern politics, and gauge the importance of Ficino's and Pico's works as catalysts for a renewed interpretation of the conception of mankind and its relationship with the divine. The scope of the issues investigated seeks to generate interest across the traditional disciplinary precincts of Renaissance Studies. Especially for its precise assessment of the complex intellectual dynamics between 1400 and 1600, this project offers a significant contribution to understanding the foundations of what we conventionally define as "modernity."

Recognizing the transformational import of the Italian Renaissance, this volume also aims to provide a multi-faceted reading of the enduring significance of medieval and ancient motifs, such as the role of Rome as a (quasi) global empire and the relationship between Christian

orthodoxy and its heretical opponents. It is our belief that the distance and the continuity between old and new worlds hinge on man's awareness of his own role in relation to religious and secular authorities. The development of scientific knowledge and of new weaponry, the rise of new forms of political communities, and the affirmation of the freedom and of the dignity of man cannot be understood in an institutional vacuum or independently of a politico-theological framework. Despite efforts to shift the boundaries between the individual and a higher power, whether human or divine, the need for such boundaries is never erased. The poignancy of this bond is epitomized by Christopher Columbus: a man imbued with a profound sense of religiosity, often characterized as medieval, but endowed with a keen interest in new geographic theories, who inadvertently charted a route to the New World. His journey westward toward the East spearheaded a movement which continues to resonate in our time. Among the many questions it has raised for Western thinkers are the following: what happens when two worldviews collide? What makes a new world become old?

From this standpoint, the cultural challenges of the current historical period—characterized by a redefinition of its world order comparable to the crisis that occurred as a consequence of Columbus's voyage and the opening of a new frontier—highlight the need for studying the many-sided history of the Renaissance's contribution to modern Western civilization. The ongoing development of ever more sophisticated means of communications engenders an increasingly rapid turnover of people, ideas, technologies, and financial resources throughout the globe, particularly across the Pacific Ocean, from North America to the Far East (or the Far West). This process seems to parallel the analogous shift that began to take place more than five hundred years ago across the Atlantic. In light of these current global challenges, *New Worlds and the Italian Renaissance* engages in an examination of the essential values of our culture.

The papers in this volume are arranged thematically in four parts. Part One explores the origins and repercussions of a key event in the transition to modernity: Columbus's journey to the West Indies. Giuseppe Mazzotta describes the discovery of the New World as the outcome of both religious fervor and the diffusion of scientific knowledge from the cultural laboratory of Quattrocento Florence. If faith and science were inextricably intertwined from Columbus's perspective, their relationship was fraught by the traumatic aftermath of his discovery, characterized as it was by the fierce debates on the legitimacy of the occupation of the West Indies.

The following paper focuses on the influence of Columbus's discovery of the "new world" on "old world" concerns of cultural preservation. Based on her research into a neglected corpus of Renaissance epics inspired by the journey of Columbus, Erin McCarthy-King argues that the geographical boundaries transgressed by the Genoese expatriate were construed in close connection with the linguistic boundaries drawn through the *questione della lingua*. Her analysis of the antithetical perceptions of the Columbus journey offered by participants in this debate such as Bembo and Guicciardini shows how efforts to standardize Italian in an age of geographical expansion was both a reaction to the plurilinguistic movement and a means of self-definition, determining not only linguistic and stylistic boundaries, but the boundaries of the nation that language represents.

The papers presented in Part Two examine the contributions of political theory and practice to the early modern intellectual tradition. Michael Komorowski's study of civic panegyrics traces the influence of Leonardo Bruni's *Laudatio Florentinae urbis* (1403/04) prior to the formation of the Italian League in 1455. By examining the civic panegyrics and chancery correspondence of Pier Candido Decembrio, secretary to the Duke of Milan, and of Poggio Bracciolini, secretary in the Curia and later Chancellor of Florence, Komorowski argues that the genre modeled by Bruni was conceived less as a means of instilling civic virtue than as a means of communicating public policy to humanists abroad who were often themselves state bureaucrats. Komorowski's understanding of civic panegyric as an instrument of diplomacy calls for a broadening of our conception of civic humanism to include intellectuals working under so-called tyrannies as well as humanists whose goals may have been larger than the instruction of their audience in civic virtue.

Turning to the political landscape of Northern Italy in the late Quattrocento, Marco Versiero examines a largely unexplored dimension of Leonardo da Vinci's iconic modernity. Contrary to the assertions of Leonardo's political detachment that have held sway since the Risorgimento, Versiero argues that the artist played an important role in the vernacular regeneration of political discourse that distinguished the Italian Renaissance. Looking beyond the political implications of Leonardo's career as an urban planner, military architect, and engineer, Versiero focuses on the political vocabulary that characterizes Leonardo's writings during his tenure at the court of Ludovico Sforza. In the following paper, Daniel Leisawitz explores the relationship between Renaissance technology and modern cinema in Ermanno Olmi's 2001 film, *Il mestiere delle armi*.

In this cinematic adaptation of the last week in the life of Giovanni dalle Bande Nere, the hero's defeat by the military technology he refused to employ throughout his career is contrasted with the celebrity achieved by his secretary, Pietro Aretino, by means of the printing press. According to Leisawitz, Olmi's exploration of the ambivalent linkage of power and technology in the Italian Renaissance serves as a commentary on our modern condition from a starting point of its development. In the fourth and final paper of Part Two, Jason Taylor engages both the innovative and the retrospective qualities of Machiavelli's political thought by focusing on his treatment of religion in the first book of the *Discourses on Livy*. By analyzing the degree to which Machiavelli rehearses the ancient historian's regard for a venerable past and his critique of the present on the grounds of its negligence in religious matters, Taylor offers a nuanced perspective on the religious foundations of Machiavelli's alleged secularism.

The intersection of the sacred and the secular sets the stage for the religious orientation of the papers presented in Part Three. Lorenza Tromboni examines the vicissitudes of Girolamo Savonarola's relationship to Marsilio Ficino and the diversity of their perspectives on the spiritual crisis of late Quattrocento Florence. Through a comparative analysis of Savonarola's sermons, didactic works, and denunciations of the "pagan" practices of the Laurentian circle, Tromboni demonstrates the Dominican friar's indebtedness to the rhetorical strategies of the group's most outspoken representative. Caroline Stark looks back to the early Quattrocento origins of the conception of man that distinguished the Florentine cultural milieu. Her consideration of early humanist responses to the misery of the human condition described by Pope Innocent III's eponymous treatise focuses on the influence of Poggio Bracciolini's rediscovery of the anthropologies of Lucretius and Manilius in 1417. By examining the reception of these works in the writings of two fifteenth-century humanist poets, Lorenzo Bonincontri and Giovanni Pontano, Stark illuminates the classical and Christian inspiration of the conception of man that would become part and parcel of both the Protestant and Catholic Reformations. One of the most progressive protagonists of sixteenth-century religious reform is the focus of Stefania Salvadori's essay. In response to John Calvin's trial and condemnation of the alleged heretic Michael Servetus, Sebastian Castellio formulated a doctrine of religious tolerance for which he has long been celebrated as a thinker of the Enlightenment *ante litteram*. Salvadori probes the legitimacy of this claim. While Castellio's defense of the freedom of human conscience and his appeal to the efficacy of the intellect are indeed anticipatory of the age of reason that was

to follow, Salvadori takes care to underscore the theological parameters of Castello's vision. The doctrine of tolerance that emerges from her analysis of *De Arte Dubitandi* is less a harbinger of modern secularism than a dynamic reinforcement of the relationship between faith and knowledge. Part Three concludes with Toby Levers's examination of syncretism—the systematic reconciliation of disparate religious traditions and one of the preeminent thought experiments of Renaissance Humanism. Focusing on Pico della Mirandola's philosophy of synthesis, Levers evaluates syncretism's interpretative claims in light of its methodological connections to “literalism,” the two-sided coin of biblical exegesis exchanged by late medieval theories of interpretation. In so doing, he identifies the ongoing debates over the *sensus litteralis* as critical background for Pico's philosophical system of correspondence and esoteric unity.

The last part of the book is dedicated to literary reflections and refractions of the various markers of modernity explored throughout this volume. James Coleman investigates the novelty of Angelo Poliziano's approach to literary scholarship vis-à-vis his elder contemporaries Cristoforo Landino and Marsilio Ficino. Contrary to assertions of Poliziano's abandonment of the Platonic notion of poetic inspiration after having studied the Greek text of Aristotle's *Poetics*, Coleman argues that Poliziano's poetic enterprise was one of reconciliation. Drawing on works from different stages of Poliziano's life, in particular, the *Orfeo* and the *Nutricia*, he demonstrates the author's integration of the doctrine of poetic frenzy with his modern fascination with the burgeoning field of philological inquiry. The influence of Aristotle's *Poetics* on the literary culture of the Italian Renaissance would reach its apogee in the epic poetry of the Cinquecento, to which the final paper of this volume is devoted. Andrea Moudarres examines Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* as the projection of two historical events which carried profound repercussions for the whole of Christendom: the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, followed by the siege of Vienna in 1529 and the battle of Lepanto in 1571, and Columbus's discovery of the West Indies, with the subsequent Spanish occupation of the new continent in the early decades of the sixteenth century. Read through the prism of the political and theological debates inspired by these events, Moudarres argues that the *Liberata* reflects a less imperialistic ideology that has generally been assumed. Indeed, by revisiting medieval understandings of the relationship between Christianity and Islam in an age of geographical expansion, Tasso offers an incisive critique of the pursuit of religious unity by political means.

The essays presented in the following pages do not pretend to provide comprehensive answers to the elemental questions they address. Rather, they are intended as an invitation to further inquiry into the constantly shifting boundaries of modernity's new worlds.

PART ONE

NEW BOUNDARIES OF THE WORLD

THE EMERGENCE OF MODERNITY AND THE NEW WORLD

Giuseppe Mazzotta

At the heart of our conventional current understanding of modernity lie two major arguments, one formal and one substantial. Formally, modernity is distinguished by a paradox: it asks that we abandon “totalizing metanarratives” in favor of pluralities, discontinuities, and difference, but it does so by positing the hegemonic, transcendent value of the Enlightenment worldview. Substantially, modernity makes the argument about a break-down in the traditional medieval faith in the transcendent force organizing the human world along rational and secular lines. The exact point at which this modernity began has long been disputed, its purported heralds ranging from Petrarch, the “first modern man” because of the focus he places on the self, to Descartes, who portrays man as the subject of experience, the agent of all knowledge, and the center of one’s own thoughts. In either case, “modernity” describes a time in history when the kingdom of subjective individualism appears on the scene.

Scholars have long probed the consequences of this historical shift from a theological Middle Ages to a secular modernity. The major implication of viewing man as the center around which all other entities revolve and of making him the measure of all values concerns our understanding of nature. In the Middle Ages, nature was a *liber naturae*, a book written by the finger of God. With the advent of modernity, nature is seen as fulfilling utilitarian ends. From this understanding of nature follows the notion of science and technology as instruments through which human beings achieve mastery and dominance over the world of nature.

This historical scheme hinges on some other legitimate evidence. Men of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—Machiavelli, Bacon, Descartes, Galileo, and Spinoza—are credited with drafting the “modern project” by paving the way to an unprecedented form of skepticism known as Pyrrhonism. Because of their work, according to conventional wisdom, the old foundations of understanding, on which the edifice of our beliefs stood, crumble, and out of the ruins a new world is rebuilt.

This view of modernity—as I will show here—is not the whole story. There is an alternate modernity lying at the foundation of our Western consciousness and shaping its development. For instance, individualism cannot be construed in and of itself as the expression and even less as

the source of modernity. In the Augustinian representation of the self and in Petrarch's steady self-absorption, the self reaches the deepest recesses of his religious beliefs. By the same token, the Cartesian inquiry into the *cogito* is meant as an attempt to neutralize skepticism and to locate a secure stronghold of certainty within the thinking self. More than that, the emergence of modernity, that is, of a time in which history is understood in "secular" terms (whatever the adjective means), cannot be attributed solely to the role played by one or another individual considered in isolation, be it Petrarch, Copernicus, Machiavelli, or Descartes.

I will argue, on the contrary, that our modern age (leaving aside the phenomenon of post-modernism that seems to be superseding it) was made possible not by one figure but by one traumatic event: the discovery of the New Worlds, which a German aristocrat, Martin Waldseemüller, called "America." What brought about the discovery were new ways of thinking that had the power of turning ancient utopian dreams and longings into a reality. More specifically, it was the Renaissance of the Quattrocento, in the totality of its manifestation, that lay the foundations and opened up the horizon of a new modern culture and the invention of a new world. It was the cultural—in particular, the technological and scientific—achievement of the Quattrocento that set man in his historical condition, at grips with the realities of existence and with the freedom to make himself in whatever shape he chose. Unavoidably, when Renaissance man discovered himself and his freedom vis-à-vis history, he also discovered new worlds and new perspectives. The New World existed not only in the mind, as it had for centuries, but in the reality of human geography. Columbus's discovery of America, which was understood as an epochal event in history, opening up a new sense of space and time, literally, a new future, was made possible by the sciences of the Quattrocento whereby the understanding of the shape of the Earth was altered.

One man, writing out of Spain, immediately grasped the significance and uniqueness of the event of Columbus's discovery: Pietro Martire di Anghiera, known to us as Peter Martyr d'Anghiera, secretary to Cardinal Ascanio Sforza. Born in Anghiera on Lake Maggiore in 1457, Peter Martyr became the first historian of the New World, just as Columbus can be called its first writer. His *De Orbe Novo* (*The Eight Decades*) contains chronicles about Columbus, Spain, and the Spanish court written between 1494 and 1526. They were meant for Sforza and were read by Pope Leo X and, eventually, by Pope Clement VII. The letters reveal Peter to be a model of the Renaissance man insofar as he was intellectually equipped to understand the novelties of his times. He had come to Spain in the latter part of the fifteenth century and in the early sixteenth century, as

had other humanist explorers, such as Pomponius Laetus, Columbus, the Cabots, Vespucci, Lucio Siculo, Verrazzano, the Venetian Pigafetta, the historian Ramusio, and others. With the help, at first, of Archbishop Talavera and Cardinal Ximenes, who became the confessor to Queen Isabella, Peter was appointed by the Queen as *continuo de su casa*.

The letters he began writing in October 1494—second-hand reports mixed with an eye-witness account of Columbus's reception by the Catholic sovereigns in Barcelona—touch on scientific speculations about the magnetic pole, calculations of latitude and longitude, ocean currents, the flora and fauna of the New World, the customs, superstitions, and appearance of the indigenous inhabitants of the islands, and fantastic tales of mythological creatures—giants, harpies, and mermaids. Eventually, references to the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, as much as these stock figures of Western myth, depicted the discovery as both the triumph of the poetic imagination and as an expression of the tradition of heroic legends of the founding experiences of Western history. Aeneas's quest for a new world crystallizes Peter's sense of the new event.

His account was not always accurate. Indeed, factual blunders abound. He writes, for instance, that

Christophorus Colonus, quidam Ligur vir, Fernando et Helisabethae, Regibus Catholicis, proposuit et suasit se ab occidente nostro finitimas Indiae insulas inventurum, si navigiis et rebus ad navigationem attinentibus instruerent, a quibus augeri Christiana religio et margaritarum, aromatum atque auri inopinata copia haberi facile posset. Instanti, ex regione fisco, destinata sunt tria navigia: . . . quae ab Hispanis 'caravelas' vocantur. His habitis, ab Hispanis littoribus, circiter calendas Septembris anni secundi et nonagesimi supra quadringentesimum et millesimum a nostra salute, iter institutum cum viris Hispanis circiter ducentis viginti Colonus coepit.¹

The mistakes punctuating the letter are now evident. One of them, for instance, concerns the source of the funds. They came not only from the

¹ Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, *De Orbe Novo Decades* (Genoa: Dipartimento di archeologia, filologia classica e loro tradizioni, 2005), vol. 1, 40. "A certain Christopher Columbus, a Genoese, proposed to the Catholic King and Queen, Ferdinand and Isabella, to discover the islands which touch the Indies, by sailing from the Western extremity of this country. He asked for ships and whatever was necessary to navigation, promising not only to propagate the Christian religion, but also to certainly bring back pearls, spices, and gold beyond anything ever imagined. He succeeded in persuading them and, in response to his demands, they provided him with expenses of the royal treasury with three ships . . . of the kind called by the Spaniard *caravels*. When everything was ready Columbus sailed from the coast of Spain, about the calends of September in the year 1492, taking with him about 220 Spaniards." The English translation is taken from Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, *De Orbe Novo*, trans. Francis Augustus MacNutt (New York: Putnam, 1912), vol. 1, 57–58.

crown, but also from Genoese and Florentine bankers and from *conversos*. Second, Peter does not seem to know that the first voyage began in Palos on August 3, 1492. And, as we read on the floor of the Seville cathedral, Columbus left “with three galleys and ninety crew members.”

These mistakes force us to question Peter’s penchant for factual details but they do not obscure the real thrust of his account, his shrewd sense of how the theology, science, economics, and politics of the discovery were to be tied together. He stresses the political importance of the event by highlighting that it would increase knowledge about an unknown part of the world. It would bring wealth to the crown and propagate the Christian religion. From this viewpoint, Peter Martyr moves in the wake of Columbus’s own self-understanding. Columbus’s own narrative of the first voyage—known as the *Journal*—contains a letter remarkably akin to Peter’s analysis that he sent to Ferdinand and Isabella before sailing from Palos. The 1492 letter reads:

Porque, cristianissimos y muy altos y muy excelentes y muy poderosos Príncipes, Rey e Reina de las Españas y de las islas de la mar, Nestro Señores, este presente año de 1492, después de Vuestras Altezas aver dado fin a la guerra de los moros, que reinavan en Europa, y aver acabado la guerra en la muy grande ciudad de Granada, adonde este presente año, a dos días del mes de Enero, por fuerça de armas vide poner las vanderas reales de Vuestras Altezas en las torres de la Alhambra, que es la fortaleza de la dicha ciudad, y vide salir al rey moro a las puertas de la ciudad, y besar las reales manos de Vuestras Altezas y del Príncipe mi Señor, y luego en aquel presente mes, por la información que yo avía dado a Vuestras Altezas de las tierras de India y de un Príncipe que es llamado Gran Can (que quiere dezir en nuestro romance Rey de los Reyes), como muchas vezes él y sus antecesores avían enbiado a Roma a pedir doctores en nuestra sancta fe porque le enseñasen en ella, y que nunca el Sancto Padre le avía proveído y se perdian tantos pueblos, cayendo en idolatrías e resçibiendo en sí sectas de perdiçion; y Vuestras Altezas, como cathólicos cristianos y príncipes amadores de la sancta fe cristiana y acreçentadores d’ella y enemigos de la secta de Mahoma y de todas idolatrías y heregías, pensaron de enbiarme a mí, Cristóval Colón, a las sichas partidas de India para aver los dichos príncipes y los pueblos y las tierras y la disposición d’ellas y de todo, y la manera que se pudiera tener para la conversión d’ellas a nuestra sancta fe, y ordenaron que yo no fuese por tierra al oriente, por donde se costumbra de andar, salvo por el camino de Occidente, por donde hasta oy no sabemos por cierta fe que aya passado nadie.²

² Cristóbal Colón, *Textos y documentos completos. Relaciones de viajes, cartas y memoriales*, ed. Consuelo Varela (Madrid: Alianza, 1982), 15–16. “Whereas, Most Christian, High,

We are mercifully at some remove from the 1992 world-wide centenary celebration of Columbus's first voyage of discovery. No aspect of the expedition was left unexplored by scholars in that arc of time: the main events of his life, the practical mercantile purposes of the voyage (finding a trade route to the East by going West), navigational methods, the financing of the venture, the number and origins of sailors who embarked with him, not to mention the sad, even tragic denouement of the admiral's life, who spent his last years secluded—though not quite like Marco Polo—in a sort of quixotic, visionary solitude: a defeated man, who, however neglected, clung to his idea that God wanted him to be the new Adam in the Garden of Eden, and therefore thought that world history could start all over again thanks to his providential, apocalyptic discovery of “a new heaven and a new earth.”

Thanks to those investigations we even know the list of books Columbus took along on his first voyage: Ptolemy's *Geography*, which he himself annotated; Marco Polo's *Il Milione*; a historical volume by the humanist Enea Silvio Piccolomini, who became Pope Pius II in 1458; and the cosmological-fanciful *Imago mundi* by the French Dominican friar Pierre d'Ailly. Notwithstanding this accrued wealth of knowledge, opinions about Columbus range from claims that he was a fraud and an imposter, a cynical self-promoter, a brutal colonizer who allowed the rape of the indigenous culture, the secret lover of Queen Isabella, or a

Excellent, and Powerful Princes, King and Queen of Spain and of the Islands of the Sea, our Sovereigns, this present year 1492, after your Highnesses had terminated the war with the Moors reigning in Europe, the same having been brought to an end in the great city of Granada, where on the second day of January, this present year, I saw the royal banners of your Highnesses planted by force of arms upon the towers of the Alhambra, which is the fortress of that city, and saw the Moorish king come out at the gate of the city and kiss the hands of your Highnesses, and of the Prince my Sovereign; and in the present month, in consequence of the information which I had given your Highnesses respecting the countries of India and of a Prince, called Great Can, which in our language signifies King of Kings, how, at many times he, and his predecessors had sent to Rome soliciting instructors who might teach him our holy faith, and the holy Father had never granted his request, whereby great numbers of people were lost, believing in idolatry and doctrines of perdition. Your Highnesses, as Catholic Christians, and princes who love and promote the holy Christian faith, and are enemies of the doctrine of Mahomet, and of all idolatry and heresy, determined to send me, Christopher Columbus, to the above-mentioned countries of India, to see the said princes, people, and territories, and to learn their disposition and the proper method of converting them to our holy faith; and furthermore directed that I should not proceed by land to the East, as is customary, but by a Westerly route, in which direction we have hitherto no certain evidence that any one has gone.” The English translation is taken from Christopher Columbus, *Writings of Christopher Columbus: Descriptive of the Discovery and Occupation of the New World*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford (New York: Webster, 1892), 22–29.

radical Franciscan fervently believing in the ancient dream of an imminent *renovatio mundi*.³

I will not address these contradictory perspectives articulated by recent interpreters of Columbus, and I discuss Columbus only to highlight the tangle of elements underneath the epoch-making, decisive phenomenon of modernity: the discovery of the “new world” and its relationship to the “old world.” Because it was at the same time an intellectual and scientific venture and a historical event, it has become a unique watershed in history. How did it happen? And what happened in the wake of the discovery? One thing is clear from Columbus: the paragraphs of the 1492 letter to Ferdinand and Isabella quoted above recapitulate and crystallize Columbus’s insight into the core values and myths of Spain’s understanding of itself and of its recent history. The overshadowing background of Spain’s involvement in and undertaking of Columbus’s expedition—the genuine subtext of the venture—is Spain’s victory over the Moslems and, after centuries of subjection, the newly found, hard-fought unity of Spain. The Moors, Columbus writes, no longer reign in Europe; the banners flying from the towers of the Alhambra are Spain’s; the Kubla Khan, emperor of the Mongols (a reference to Marco Polo’s account two centuries earlier) solicits religious instruction from Rome in vain.

The global co-ordinates of Spain’s new historical self-awareness are carefully, if obliquely, clarified. Columbus’s voyages belong to the new sense of a world-wide imperial mission for Christianity on the part of Spain: the New World originates as part and parcel of old-world fantasies of power. Specifically, politics and theology are yoked together in the boundless self-confidence of a land united under the visionariness and fervor of its sovereigns. Other texts of Columbus trace and confirm this view of Spain’s ambitions: the 1498 letter to the monarchs in which he describes his third voyage to America repeats these ideas of Spain’s new political theology: “y se cumplirá todo lo que dixo, El [Dios] cual tan claro habló d’estas tieras por la boca de Isaías en tantos lugares de sue scriptura, afirmando que de España les sería divulgado su sancto nombre” (“... I believe that every project which I hold out will be accomplished; for it was clearly predicted concerning these lords, by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, in many places in Scripture, that from Spain the holy word of God was to be

³ Cf. John Lamer, “The Certainty of Columbus: Some Recent Studies,” *History* 37 (1988): 3–23. See also Erin McCarthy-King’s essay in the present volume.

spread abroad").⁴ If Columbus is the "new man," the first modern man, a new Adam naming this New World, Spain is for Columbus the land where modernity begins. And it begins by retrieving the culture of Rome. Thus, Columbus corrects Ptolemy's speculation about the shape of the earth and submits the idea that it resembles a pear, "una pelota muy redonda y en lugar d'ella fuesse como una teta de mugger alli puesta" ("a round ball, upon one part of which is a prominence like a woman's nipple");⁵ he authenticates the patristic and scholastic hypotheses, put forth by Ambrose, Isidore, Bede, and Scotus, among others, about the location of the Garden of Eden;⁶ and he glosses the Book of Genesis.⁷ In short, history's new beginning, under the Spanish monarchs, is at hand.

I do not mean to downplay the radical religious faith that inspired Columbus's purpose by drawing attention to Spain's political theology. It was faith that pushed him to venture out into new seas. But it was not only faith that made the journey feasible. The journey was made possible by scientific knowledge, and so we are compelled to seek the source of this technological rebirth. I submit—as stated above—that the discoveries of New Worlds by the likes of Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, and Vasco de Gama came out of the intellectual challenges and ways of thinking articulated by the Florentine Quattrocento. To be sure, the science and technology supporting these expeditions into unknown spaces were neither particularly Florentine nor did they come into existence in the Quattrocento. The theory of the sphericity of the earth, which entailed that by sailing westward a ship would eventually reach land in the East, had been held by ancient writers such as Plato, Aristotle, Aristarchus of Samos, Pliny, and Strabo, and preserved all the way down to the "Atlas Catalan." And the belief that new lands lay outside the limitations and perimeter of Europe is best expressed by the prophecy of Seneca: "Venient annis/ secula seris, quibus Oceanus/ vincula rerum laxet, & ingens/ pateat tellus Tiphisque novos/ detegat orbes, nec sit terries ultima Thule" ("... There

⁴ Cristóbal Colón, *Textos y documentos completos. Relaciones de viajes, cartas y memorias*, ed. Consuelo Varela (Madrid: Alianza, 1982), 205. The English translation is taken from Christopher Columbus, *Writings of Christopher Columbus: Descriptive of the Discovery and Occupation of the New World*, 107.

⁵ Christopher Columbus, *Textos y documentos completos*, 133; *Writings of Christopher Columbus*, 215.

⁶ Christopher Columbus, *Textos y documentos completos*, 140; *Writings of Christopher Columbus*, 217.

⁷ Christopher Columbus, *Textos y documentos completos*, 144; *Writings of Christopher Columbus*, 219.

will come an age in the far-off years when Ocean shall unloose the bonds of things, when the whole broad earth shall be revealed, when Tethys shall disclose new worlds and Thule not be the limit of the lands").⁸

By the same token, cartography and topography, which were central to the voyages of exploration toward the end of the fifteenth century, have existed, however imperfectly, since the beginnings of history.⁹ As the historian José Martín López has shown, traces of the project to produce a total representation of the world—cosmology and astronomy—are found in ancient Egypt. A twelfth-century version of the "Tabula Peutingeriana," compiled between fourth and the fifth centuries C.E. and preserved in the Cistercian monastery of the Holy Trinity in Vienna, shows an extraordinarily detailed map for sailors of harbors, lighthouses, and coastlines. The atlases and maps of Ptolemy's *Geography* discuss the longitudes and latitudes utilized by Arab astronomers and cartographers such as Al-Fazari, who is credited with the invention of the astrolabe. Finally, as far as technological instruments of navigation are concerned, even the compass or magnetic needle pointing always to the north (with which the Chinese appear to have been familiar for centuries) became widely available to Mediterranean sailors from the beginning of the thirteenth century thanks to Flavio Gioia. Gioia's innovation, which indicated under the needle the courses of the winds, paved the way to the so-called "portolans," or navigational charts, the exemplary one being the "Carta Pisana," which shows the direction of winds and description of coastlines. In 1459 Fra Mauro, a Venetian monk, drew a map of the world for Alphonse V of Portugal. For that matter, and more poignantly, it has been established, though the matter is still controversial, that Norwegian travelers had reached the American continent in the ninth century.

No doubt, all these technological advances from all over the Mediterranean basin form an impressive fund of knowledge and play a crucial part in the art of navigation. In no way, however, do they explain the question of modernity, the revolutionary idea and reality of the discovery of the New World. The uniqueness of the discovery consists in the fact that what probably took place as a chance occurrence turned into history and altered history's course. The shift was made possible by the Renaissance conception of the possible manipulation of space.

⁸ Seneca, *Medea* 375–379, in *Seneca's Tragedies*, trans. Frank Justus Miller (London: William Heinemann, 1927), vol. 1, 261.

⁹ José Martín López, *Historia de la Cartografía y de la Topografía* (Madrid: Centro Internacional de Información Geográfica, 2004).

It would be a difficult task to attempt an encompassing account of the vast, complex phenomenon known as the Quattrocento, and it would be absurd to expect an exhaustive synopsis of its intellectual currents. The task is made more arduous by a certain scholastic conceit in reducing Quattrocento Humanism to its rhetorical-Ciceronian aspects (e.g. a retrieval of the Roman past, the value of language and philology, a belief in the continuity of the classical tradition) and bypassing the powerful scientific culture that developed alongside the tradition of historical-hermeneutical studies. There are scholars, such as Eugenio Garin, and, more recently, Sebastiano Gentile, to mention a few, who counter the common rhetorical tendency and recognize Humanism as a crossroads of rhetorical and scientific strains of thought.¹⁰ No quarrel, in effect, exists between these two currents of Renaissance culture. The study of the natural order by the physical sciences was methodically bound together with the archaeologies of Greco-Roman history and the two of them share a common philological background.

At any rate, the movements developing within fifteenth-century Florence—the emergence of a scientific outlook, theological controversies between Greeks and Latins, the strains of voluntarism against scholasticism, and Neoplatonism—were disorganized enough to escape the grasp of a unifying logic. And yet, so totalizing was the period's intellectual reach that it literally altered man's point of view. The science of perspective marked the onset of a new epistemology that reached into a mobile figuration of space, transforming the earth into a historical "world."

One example of the general goal of drawing the global horizon of one's narrow, regional history is the revival of geography in the fifteenth century.¹¹ The interest goes back to the fourteenth-century works by Boccaccio and Petrarch. The *Geography* of Ptolemy, brought to Florence by Manuel Chrysoloras and translated by Giacomo da Scarperia, provided the blueprint for a broad worldview that would lead to different ways of seeing the world. Another discipline connected with geography that flourished at this time, in conjunction with mathematics and theories of representation of space, is topography. In *Ludi rerum mathematicarum* by Leon Battista Alberti (1450–52), Alberti describes a method of picturing various places, such as the city of Rome, according to specific co-ordinates. Further, we

¹⁰ Sebastiano Gentile, *Firenze e la scoperta dell'America. Umanesimo e geografia nel '400 Fiorentino* (Florence: Olschki editore, 1992).

¹¹ Cf. Luciano Formisano, ed., *Amerigo Vespucci: La vita e i viaggi* (Florence: Banca Toscana, 1991).

usually credit Alberti's *On Painting* (1436) as the text that inaugurates modernity and codifies a new, revolutionary way of looking. The idea was certainly tested by Brunelleschi, but it was Alberti who unfolded the implications of linear perspective. According to Alberti, the painter dwells upon phenomena and transforms substances into appearances that can be manipulated at will. Along with Brunelleschi and Ghiberti, Alberti's idea of perspective—the notion that reality does not exist outside of one's own perspective on it—brought about a collapse or disappearance of absolute, objective standards of representation. Such a principle affected the domains of both aesthetics and science in a number of ways.

First of all, the traditional idea of Euclidean space changed. Space was no longer understood as a fixed entity. It became a malleable, fluid reality to be understood in terms of the contingent conditions of the spectator. Secondly, philosophers and scientists from Leonardo and Copernicus to Telesio, Gassendi, and Galileo turned to the study of natural phenomena, to an *empirical* investigation of nature, light, and space. Thirdly, the notion of perspective and space introduces the idea of making. The ancient belief in the superiority of contemplation to action and in contemplation as the end of knowledge gave way to the principle of making. We make the world, just as we make our history and ourselves. While the ancients, who pursued abstract philosophy, knew, we moderns make what they knew. The excitement over the theory of production that began with Alberti and his building of the city does not separate production from the good: it is tied to a desire to conquer nature.

The possibility of the unending perfectibility of man in a new natural context and in a new history looms on the horizon, and it appears as an ethical imperative, though Machiavelli does not hide the politics underlying the masks of conquest. One man, in particular, holds together and stands behind these strands of scientific thought: for Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli, humanist, mathematician, cosmographer, geographer, and cartographer, science and politics go hand in hand. In his optimism he sees no intrinsic limits to science.¹² Ongoing research in the state archive has deepened our knowledge of this figure and his family business. A close friend of intellects such as Cardinal Cusa, Alberti, Brunelleschi, the Vespucci family, the philosopher Cristoforo Landino, and Leonardo, Toscanelli corresponded with Regiomontanus and King Juan II of

¹² Cf. Gustavo Uzielli, *Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli iniziatore della scoperta d'America* (Florence: Stabilimento Tipografico Fiorentino, 1892).

Portugal. In 1459 he showed his elliptically shaped map of the world, known as the 1457 “Genoese map,” to the envoys of Juan II to convince him of the feasibility of circumnavigating the globe and reaching India entirely by going around Africa or sailing westward. On June 25, 1474, Toscanelli sent a letter to the canon of Lisbon, Ferdinand Martins de Roriz, who was in charge of the planning committee on Portuguese exploration. The letter describes the sphericity of the earth, charts the distance between Ireland and the Indies, and derives much of its information from Marco Polo’s *Il Milione*.

In his *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus by his Son Ferdinand*, Ferdinand addresses the issue of his father’s familiarity with the sciences. Christopher learned, so his son claims, his letters at the University of Pavia, where he also studied geography, astronomy, and geometry. Ferdinand attributes to Columbus both a scientific knowledge based on the authority of Ptolemy, Marinus, Averroes, and Strabo, and on the authority of Paolo Toscanelli. This is what Ferdinand writes:

come che un maestro Paolo Fisico di maestro Domenico fiorentino, contemporaneo dell’istesso Ammiraglio, fosse cagione in gran parte ch’egli con più animo imprendesse questo viaggio. Percioché, essendo detto maestro Paolo amico d’un Fernando Martinez, canonico di Lisbona, e scrivendosi lettere l’uno all’altro sopra la navigazione che al paese di Guinea si faceva in tempo del re Don Alfonso di Portogallo e sopra quella che si potea fare nella parte dell’Occidente, venne ciò a notizia dell’Ammiraglio, curiosissimo di queste cose, e tosto col mezzo d’un Lorenzo Girardi fiorentino che era in Lisbona scrisse sopra ciò al detto maestro Paolo, e gli mandò una picciola sfera, scoprendogli il suo intent. A cui maestro Paolo mandò la risposta in latino.¹³

One gathers (distortions and mis-information aside) that Columbus understood the basic scientific component of his adventure. At any rate, his venture across the ocean in itself shows that his ability to cope with

¹³ “He (Christopher Columbus) was also influenced by a master Paolo, physician to Master Domenico, a Florentine, a contemporary of the admiral’s, who played a role in encouraging him to undertake this voyage. This master Paolo was a friend of Fernão Martins, a canon of Lisbon, and they wrote each other letters about the voyages to the country of Guinea that were being made at the time of King Alfonso of Portugal and the possibility of other voyages to the Western regions. This came to the attention of the admiral, who was extremely interested in these things, and immediately, through the agency of Lorenzo Girardi, a Florentine who was residing in Lisbon, he wrote about this to Master Paolo and sent him a small sphere on which he indicated his plan. Master Paolo replied to him in Latin.” Both the original and English translation are taken from Ilaria Caraci Luzzana, ed., *The History of the Life and Deeds of the Admiral Don Christopher Columbus: Attributed to his Son Fernando Colón*, trans. Geoffrey Symcox and Blair Sullivan (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 245 [42].

the challenges of the journey was unquestioned. While the cities receded as he sailed out of Palos, he trespassed into an imaginary space. And as night deepened while the quest for a possible world began, he faced the mortal dangers of open and unmapped seas without flinching. If nothing else, he certainly found out that the path of imagination and science he had undertaken was also the path of faith.

Reams of books have been written to illustrate the religious dimensions of Columbus's personality. They have cast him as a religious visionary in the tradition of the millennialism of Joachim of Fiore and the prophetic impulses of the Middle Ages. In no way do I question any of it. The time he spent at the convent of La Rábida (1485); the choice of two Franciscan friars, Juan Perez and Antonio Marchena, to help him argue his case to Queen Isabella his burial in the Franciscan habit; his *Libro de las Profecias* and the *Lettera Rarissima* give ample proof of his religious call. If Vespucci was exclusively a man of science, Columbus yoked science to religion and brooked no division between the two.

The history of the New World, which is the history of the emergence of modernity, however, shows a deep rift between theology and politics. Once the excitement over the new discoveries faded, the reality of the expedition showed its ruthless face and the paradisiacal veil that had enshrouded the initial enthusiasm was torn away. In the New World, Jesuits experimented with utopias and found the limits of human perfectibility (which Europe discarded as an illusion only in the twentieth century). Power set in, and in Mexico the "new world" came to designate the place of a radical separation of politics from the good and the surrender to the overarching idolatry of gold. The final words in Tommaso Campanella's *Città del Sole* about Hernán Cortés, who established Christianity in Mexico, and about the Jesuits' power to offset the "vapori infetti" of "Lutero cadavero" ("the infectious vapors from Luther's cadaver") were sinister portents of what was to come. The political consequences of the discovery are now well known: genocide, torture, inexistence of human rights, representation of the natives as natural slaves, cannibals, people prone to human sacrifice, practitioners of incest and sodomy—these are the terms of the hellish nightmare into which the discovery of the New World turned.

The economy of the shifting intellectual and moral cycles can be sharply defined. Theological impulses are secularized and utopian fantasies foment conquest and colonialism. Yet from the depths of this moral corruption a new configuration of sacrality emerges. It is as if these perspectives were steadily entangled with one another in a hybrid knot and

could be seen in isolation and whole only at a time of extreme chaos. A sign of the turnaround in the conception of the New World is the fierce debate that occurred in Valladolid in 1550 over the purposes and prospects of the conquest. The debate took place between Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and the Dominican Bartolomé de las Casas. In dramatically different ways, they are the heirs of the Italian Renaissance. Sepúlveda, a student of the naturalist philosopher Pomponazzi (who famously denied the validity of belief in the immortality of the soul) at the University of Bologna, is a humanist who wants to provide a rational and political elucidation of the Latin American reality. He encouraged Charles V—as Columbus had done with Ferdinand—to undertake a Crusade against the Turks and eventually wrote a defense of colonialism, *Demócrates Segundo* (1545), based on Aristotle's rationale for slavery. Las Casas, by contrast, is a student of Aquinas and Cajetan (Luther's antagonist). As he says in the prologue to his *History of the Indies*, he wants to

librar mi nación española del error y engaño gravísimo y perniciosísimo en que vive y siempre hasta hoy ha vivido, estimando destas océanas gentes faltarles el ser de hombres, haciéndolas brutales bestias incapaces de virtud y doctrina, depravando lo bueno que tienen y acrecentándoles lo malo que hay en ellas, como incultas y olvidadas por tantos siglos.¹⁴

Las Casas, much like Fray Melchor Cano, chair of theology at Salamanca, distances himself from Sepúlveda's views in that he sees the traces of a Humanism or modernity divorced from transcendence. His version of Christianity, as Anthony Pagden rightly notes, could not be more at variance from that of Sepúlveda: he views Christianity as a process of illumination, a way of making conscience more powerful, of opening up the force of the possible for people who had not been exposed to Revelation.¹⁵ There are several consequences of the theological perspective Las Casas

¹⁴ Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1986), vol. 1, 17. "... free my Spanish nation from the gravest and most deceitful error in which it lives and has always lived by denying the Indians the condition of human beings, making beasts of them, incapable of virtue and of being indoctrinated, depraving their goodness and encouraging the faults that result from centuries of neglect and forgetfulness." The English translation is taken from Bartolomé de Las Casas, *History of the Indies*, ed. and trans. Andrée Collard (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 10.

¹⁵ Cf. Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 119–145. See also the remarkable study by Rolena Adorno, *The Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) and Andrea Moudarres's essay in this volume.

brings to the stage of modernity. Late in his life (1563), three years before his death in Madrid, he wrote on Spain's duty to make restitution to the Indians (*De Thesauris in Peru*). Above all, in the *Devastation of the Indies*, we arrive at the core of his vision.

In denouncing the violation of the liberty of the natives, Las Casas appeals to the principle of the "derecho natural de las gentes" ("the natural law of nations"). This is the ancient classical and medieval doctrine which scholastics such as Aquinas, following in the footsteps of Cicero, had systematized. A scholar of canon law at Bologna and a student of Ulpian and Gratian's *Decretum*, Huguccio of Pisa, Bishop of Ferrara, sets forth his understanding of the concept in the following terms:

Et quia de iure naturali diversi diversa sentiunt, ideo eius diversas acceptiones in medium proponamus. Ius ergo naturale dicitur ratio, scilicet naturalis vis animi ex qua homo discernit inter bonum et malum, eligendo bonum et detestando malum. Et dicitur ratio ius quia iubet, lex quia ligat vel quia legitime agere compellit; naturale vel naturalis quia ratio unum est de naturalibus donis vel quia Summe Nature consonant et ab ea non dissentit. De hac lege vel iure naturali dicit Apostolus: 'Video aliam legem in membris meis repugnantem legi mentis mee,' id est rationi que dicitur lex sicut dictum est. Dicitur etiam secundo lodo ius naturale iudicium rationis scilicet motus proveniens ex ratione directe vel non directe, id est quodlibet opus vel operari ad quod ex ratione tenetur homo, ut est discernere, eligere et operari bonum, dare elemosinam, diligere Deum et huiusmodi.¹⁶

Clearly, natural law is identified with the principle of reason. This is Aquinas's philosophical understanding and it became central to Cajetan's and to the theological ruminations of Las Casas's contemporary and theorist of neo-Scholasticism, Francisco de Vitoria (1485–1546). The epilogue of his treatise condenses the argument:

¹⁶ Huguccio Pisanus, *Summa decretorum*, ed. Oldrich Prerovsky (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2006–). "And because different people have different views on the natural law, let us set forth its different meanings. Thus, the natural law is said to be reason in so far as it is a natural power of the soul by which the human person distinguishes between good and evil, choosing good and rejecting evil. And reason is said to be a law (*ius*), because it commands; also it is said to be law (*lex*) because it binds (*ligat*) or because it compels one to act rightly; it is said to be natural, because reason is one of the natural goods, or because it agrees supremely with nature, and does not dissent from it. Concerning this natural law, the Apostle says, 'I see another law in my members, which opposes the law of the mind,' that is to say, reason, which is called law, just as has been said. Now in the second place, the natural law is said to be a judgment of reason, that is, a motion proceeding from reason, directly or indirectly; that is, any work or operation to which one is obliged by reason, as to discern, to choose, and to do good, to give alms, to love God, and those sorts of things. . . ." The English translation is my own.

Ergo etiam non licet occidere omnes nocentes ex hostibus. Oportet ergo habere rationem iniuriae ab hostibus acceptae et damni illati et aliorum delictorum, et ex hac consideratione procedere ad vindictam et animadversionem, omni atrocitate et inhumanitate seclusa. In hoc enim proposito Cicero (secundo *Officiorum*) ait quod animadvertendum est in noxios, quantum aequitas et humanitas patiantur.¹⁷

The statement explicitly recapitulates the human belief in nature as the source of law, a principle found in Cicero's *De officiis*. Nature as reason is not to be mastered simply because its role is to rule. More importantly, natural law is seen as the foundation of individual rights: it tells us that all men are born free, that no person can claim political jurisdiction over another, and that human rights are absolute, which means that they do not depend on any social structure whatsoever.

But this theological critique of power and of the savagery of conquest had a particular moral consequence: it saved the Indians from total annihilation, it invested them with an aura of sacrality, and it dramatically marked the limitations of the "political." More importantly, it laid the foundations for the universality of a law which the later Enlightenment has made common knowledge. But the matrix of this modernity— theological, scientific, and political—can be rightly called the conceptual innovation of the Renaissance worldview. A difference exists between the two historical epochs. Whereas the Enlightenment lost sight of the alternative modernity by its impulse to homogenize cultures in the name of an abstract idea of reason, the thought of the Renaissance was nourished by a historical memory of nature and reason comprised of customs, habits, and moral values. From this knot of a complex understanding of history and nature emanated those convictions that the "old world" made its own. In so doing, it can be credited with sketching an alternative to the current understanding of how modern worlds are made.

¹⁷ "Therefore it is not right to kill all the guilty among the enemy. We ought, then, to take into account the nature of the wrong done by the enemy and of the damage they have caused and of their offenses, and from that standpoint to move to our revenge and punishment, without any cruelty and inhumanity. In this connection Cicero says (*De officiis*, bk. 2) that the punishment which we inflict on the guilty must be such as equity and humanity allow." Both the original and the English translation are taken from Francisco de Vitoria, *De Indis et De Iure Belli Relectiones*, ed. Ernest Nys (Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1917), 292 [182–83].

THE VOYAGE OF COLUMBUS AS A “NON PENSATO MALE”:
THE SEARCH FOR BOUNDARIES, GRAMMAR, AND AUTHORITY
IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE NEW WORLD DISCOVERIES

Erin McCarthy-King

Ma volgendosi gli anni, io veggio uscire
da l'estreme contrade di ponente
nuovi Argonauti e nuovi Tifi, e aprire
la strada ignota infin al dì presente:
altri volteggiar l'Africa, e seguire
tanto la costa de la negra gente,
che passino quel segno onde ritorno
fa il sole a noi, lasciando il Capricorno;
e ritrovar del lungo tratto il fine,
che questo fa parer dui mar diversi;
e scorrer tutti i liti e le vicine
isole d'Indi, d'Arabi e di Persi:
altri lasciar le destre e le mancine
rive che due per opra Erculea fêrsi;
e del sole imitando il camin tondo,
ritrovar nuove terre e nuovo mondo.

(*Orlando Furioso* 15.21–22)¹

Canto 15 of the *Orlando Furioso* glorifies the exploratory enterprises of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century navigators. While the English duke Astolfo journeys westward from India toward Europe, he asks his guide Andronica about the possibility of reaching the same destination by going in the opposite direction: “s’andar può senza toccar mai terra,/ chi d’India scioglia, in Francia o in Inghilterra” (“was it possible to set sail from India

¹ Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1997). “But with the passage of time I see new Argonauts, new Tiphyses hailing from the lands which lie furthest to the West, who shall open routes unknown to this day. Some of them shall round Africa, following the shores of the black peoples right on past the limits whence the sun returns to us after leaving Capricorn;/ they shall discover the limit of the long stretch of land which makes us imagine two separate seas. They shall sail along every shore and past the neighbouring islands of the Indians, Arabians, and Persians. Others shall leave to their left and right the Pillars established by Hercules, and, following the circuit of the sun, discover new lands, a new world.” The English translation is taken from Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* (hereafter abbreviated *OF*), trans. Guido Waldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

and reach France or England without once making land?”).² Andronica's lengthy response in stanzas 19–35 celebrates the expansion of the Spanish realm under Charles V and alludes to the explorers of the future who would “ritrovar nuove terre e nuovo mondo”. Here, Astolfo is the explorer figure, the precursor to Vasco de Gama and Christopher Columbus, whose identities are only thinly veiled in this passage.³ The captain of a mythical journey to the moon to reclaim the sanity of Orlando, Astolfo appears both as one who exceeds the boundaries of the known world, irrevocably changing its parameters, and as one who—as an almost paradoxical outcome of his lunar journey—reconstitutes the figure of the traditional hero by restoring the “old” Orlando. He both expands traversable space and regains a classical paradigm, returning the world to order.

The way in which Ariosto casts the ground-breaking journey of the historical Columbus through the fictitious Astolfo demonstrates a tension between the new and the old, the scientific and the classical, the truth of history and the verisimilitude of the epic—a tension with which many poets struggle in their efforts to create of Columbus an epic protagonist. Some Italian poets and thinkers, claiming the Genovese expatriate as their own (despite Spanish patronage of the expedition) place the figure in a pivotal, heroic role during an era when classical ideals and a desire to reclaim the preeminence of the classical tradition are at the forefront. They hope to render him a warrior, conqueror, and victor. Like many writers in the Renaissance, Ariosto seeks to instill in the classical a sense of modernity and to emphasize that which is new while remaining within a classical context. We see this in his portraiture of Columbus as one of the “nuovi Tifi” for “nuovi Argonauti” who push beyond the limits denoted by the Pillars of Hercules. However, there are other poets who hope to construct around Columbus and his story a new kind of epic with a protagonist unlike the classical heroes led by divine Providence, one whose experiential study of the world leads to the advancement of knowledge. These writers proffer Columbus as a scientist, attributing his achievement to his use of math and astronomy and, more importantly, his willingness to abandon conventional wisdom when it seemed to contradict the conclusions of an empirical study of the world.

² OF 15.18.

³ For Angela Caracciolo Aricò's theory as to why the reference is implicit, see “Da Cortés a Colombo, da Ariosto a Tasso,” in *Il letterato tra miti e realtà del Nuovo Mondo: Venezia, il Mondo Iberico, e l'Italia* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1994), 135, where she posits that Ariosto omits the name of Columbus (and de Gama as well) in an effort to exalt the rising Charles V in Italy.

A number of writers who venture to formulate a literary Columbus and a new format for the epic are also grappling with a contemporaneous phenomenon: the pursuit of and debate over a standard written vulgate in Italy. The *questione della lingua* reaches its apogee in the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento, during which time Columbus makes his four journeys to the New World.⁴ While explorers such as Columbus, Vasco de Gama, and Ferdinand Magellan are pushing the boundaries of the known world, a number of writers are pushing linguistic boundaries, rejecting the vernacular stylistic paradigms of Dante and Petrarch in favor of plurilinguistic experimentation. Just two years before Columbus's famous first voyage, Tifi Odasi writes the *Macharonea* and with it, canonizes a new literary "language" named thereafter *macaronic*. Teofilo Folengo popularizes this ad hoc language in his four redactions of the epic *Baldus* (first edition, 1517). The quintessential example of *pedantesco*,⁵ the syntactical inversion of the *macaronic*, is the anonymous *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* of 1499, later attributed to Francesco Colonna. Other forms of linguistic experimentation, such as *latinaz* and *latinus grossus*, have roots in the turn-of-the-century university culture of Padua. Mock-heroic and scatological themes mark the content of many of these works, rendering the plurilinguistic movement not only anti-classical in language but counter-cultural in style.

It is perhaps in response to the various manners of degradation of the Italian vernacular that a movement begins which intends to reign in language. In 1501, Venetian classicist and Greek scholar Pietro Bembo edits for printer Aldo Manuzio his first crucial text, an edition of the *Canzoniere* that would amount to his first defense of Petrarchan style. In the following year, Manuzio prints an equally influential edition of Dante's *Commedia*, also edited by Bembo. With these works, Bembo begins a veritable campaign for linguistic reform and the use of Petrarchan Italian as a pure literary vulgate. It is not until the 1525 *Prose della volgar lingua*, however, that Bembo officially formalizes his proposal for linguistic and classical reform. In the crucial third book of this work, Bembo includes the first Italian grammar manual⁶ and upholds Petrarch and Boccaccio as models

⁴ His four journeys were most likely in the years 1492, 1493, 1498, and 1502.

⁵ *Macaronic* is an idiosyncratic combination of Latin grammar and lexicon and Italian syntactical structure and phraseology. Its exact opposite form is the less well-known *pedantesco*, which blends the syntax and word order of the vernacular with Latin lexical forms.

⁶ It has been debated whether Gianfrancesco Fortunio's *Regole grammaticali della vulgar lingua* (1516) actually preceded Bembo's *Prose*. Although Bembo did not publish

for imitation in poetry and prose respectively. However, Bembo's ideal is an aristocratic one. The exclusivity of his project, which would limit the use of the vernacular to the learned few, caused a stir of controversy. Numerous writers and poets over the next century would participate in this spirited linguistic debate about the form, the need, and the very legitimacy of a codified Italian. Neither Petrarchists nor anti-Petrarchists, however, are able to escape the influence of Bembo as they write grammar manuals of their own or include digressionary discourses in their works that elucidate their positions on language.⁷

In a cultural milieu in which *defining* is paramount—defining national borders and a conception of the ever-growing earth as well as defining the rules and boundaries of language—Columbus becomes a hermeneutical symbol, a representation not only of the new world map to which all of Europe must become accustomed, but of the polemics of language,

his *Prose* until 1525, Bembo's earlier works, his "campaign" across Italy for a standardized Petrarchan literary style, and preliminary drafts of the *Prose* all seem to indicate that Fortunio's *Regole* is based on Bembo's work. Bembo believed his work to have predated Fortunio's by almost a decade. In a letter to Bernardo Tasso on May 27, 1529, Bembo rails against talk that he was trying to steal the well-deserved glory of Fortunio: "Quanto al Maestro Pellegrino Moretto, che ha segnate le mie *Prose* con le parole ingiuriose che mi scrivete, potrete dirgli che egli s'inganna. Per ciò che se ad esso pare che io abbia furato il Fortunio per ciò che dico alcune poche cose, che egli avea prima dette, egli nel vero non è così. Anzi le ha egli a me furate con le proprie parole, con le quali io le aveva scritte in un mio libretto forse prima che egli sapesse ben parlare, non che male scrivere, che egli vide et ebbe in mano sua molti giorni. Il qual libro io mi profero di mostrargli ogni volta che egli voglia. . . . Oltre a ciò io potrò farlo parlar con persone grandi e dignissime di fede, che hanno da me apparate et udite tutte quelle cose, delle quali costui può ragionare, di molti e molt'anni innanzi che Fortunio si mettesse ad insegnare altrui quello, che egli non sapea" ("As for Maestro Pellegrino Moretto, who has stained my *Prose* with the injurious words that you report to me, you may tell him that he deceives himself. For, if it seems to him that I stole from Fortunio because of a few things I uttered that [Fortunio] had previously said, he is, in fact, mistaken. On the contrary, he stole them from me, using the very words that I had written in a little book—perhaps before he was able to speak, let alone write—which he had in his possession for a number of days, and which I would be eager to show him at his leisure. Furthermore, I would have him speak with the authoritative and trustworthy people who have learned and heard from me of all those matters he considers many years before Fortunio began to teach that which he ignored"). *Opere in volgare*, ed. Mario Marti (Florence: Sansoni, 1961), 801–802. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are the editors'.

⁷ Gianfrancesco Fortunio's *Regole grammaticali della vulgar lingua* (1516), Nicolò Liburnio's *De vulgari elegantie* (1521), Giorgio Trissino's *Il castellano* (1528), Baldassare Castiglione's *Cortegiano* (1528), Claudio Tolomei's dialogue entitled *Cesano, de la toscana lingua* (1528), Paolo Cortese's *De cardinalatu* (1541), Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo delle lingue* (1542), Ludovico Castelvetro's *Giunta fatta al ragionamento degli articoli et de' verbi di Messer Pietro Bembo* (1563), the *Ercolano* (pub. 1570) of Benedetto Varchi, and Alessandro Tassoni's *Considerazioni sopra le rime di Petrarca* (1609) are just a few of the well-known texts and grammar manuals that arose from this debate.

communication, and interpretation. His own complex multilingualism, his introduction to the European continent of a previously unknown culture and a number of New World linguistic variants, and the communication crisis between his sailors and the natives place him at the center of practical concerns about translation and interpretation. While one might expect poets to seize upon the notion of Columbus as a modern Adam whose nomenclature for and interpretation of elements in the New World would shape the understanding of Europeans about the new lands, most of these poets surprisingly avoid this association in favor of a more theoretical approach: namely, both the historical Columbus and the *questione della lingua* raise concerns about the notion of boundaries and limits, the known and the unknown, the permitted and the forbidden, the conventional and the unconventional. While the parameters of the earth are changing and the world is rapidly expanding, the effort to standardize Italian may be considered both a counter to the plurilinguistic movement and a centripetal force, pulling in and defining not only the limits of language and style, but the very borders of the nation that the language represents. Italians seek to affirm their identity on a newly expanded world map by plotting out their "cultural coordinates" with language.

In the centuries following the Columbus voyages at least thirteen Italian language poems⁸ attempt to heroify the admiral in an epic.⁹ Many

⁸ (1) Giovanni Giorgini's *Il Mondo nuovo* (1596) is the first completed epic; instead of Columbus, however, King Ferdinand of Spain is the hero and protagonist; (2) Giovanni Villifranchi's epic (1602) is comprised of only three cantos, two of which were published under the title *Copia del I e del II canto del Colombo*, *Poema eroico di Giovanni Villifranchi Volterrano*; (3) Guid'Ubaldo Benamati's incomplete *Delle due trombe i primi fiati cioè tre libri della Vittoria navale e tre libri del Mondo Nuovo* (1622), deals with Columbus's preparation for his voyage and his search for patronage; (4) Of Agnazio di Somma's now lost poetic attempt entitled *Amerigo*, five canti were published in Rome in (1625) (although the title implies that it centered on Amerigo Vespucci, Tassoni's *Lettera* indicates that its hero is Columbus); (5) Tommaso Stigliani's completed thirty-four canto epic *Il Mondo nuovo* (1628) fueled the fire of one of the most famous linguistic debates, recorded in the *Epistolario* of his rival, Giambattista Marino; (6) Alessandro Tassoni's incomplete *l'Oceano* was first published in 1622 but later published with a *Lettera* (1630) which served as a didactic exercise for di Somma, who had sent a copy of his nascent epic to Tassoni for criticism; (7) Girolamo Bartolomei published *L'America* in 1650; (8) Alvise Querini published his completed epic *l'Ammiraglio delle Indie* (1769) under the "pastoral name" Ormildo Emeressio, which he bore as a member of the famous Accademia dell'Arcadia. The later epics include (9) Giovanni Battista Giacomo Tamburini's *La Colombiade: poema eroico-mitologico* (1823), (10) Bernardo Bellini's *La Colombiade: poema eroico* (1826), (11) Lorenzo Costa's *Cristoforo Colombo* (1858), (12) Giuseppe Sbarra's *Il Nuovo Mondo o Cristoforo Colombo* (1862), and (13) Luigi Polfranceschi's *Cristoforo Colombo: poema epico in ottava rima* in honor of the fifth centenary of the first journey (1892).

⁹ There are at least four epics written in Latin in this time as well.

of these poets try to reconcile the glory that Columbus's work brings to Italy with the fear and insecurity that his journey augured, especially with regard to the wisdom of the ancients. Several of these poets equate Columbus's disregard for the ancients and for the boundaries of the known world with the audacious construction of the Tower of Babel by Nimrod, thereby tying the explorer both to the sinful act which bore the multiplicity of language as well as to the classical and Biblical traditions.¹⁰ I contend that the *questione della lingua* in the Cinquecento and Seicento is strongly influenced by the acknowledgement of the New World and that the relentless pursuit of a standardized Italian vernacular is a means of grasping for permanency and fixity in an era of *errantia*, the Latin term that is the root of both the words *error* (error), and *errar* (wandering). The formulation of a code of grammar—in other words, a rubric for correcting language—is an attempt to correct this “errancy.”

The Meaning of Grammar

The nexus of two such divergent concepts as grammar and errancy can be found in the *De vulgari eloquentia*. Whereas Dante juxtaposes the vulgar to simply “latino” in the *Convivio*, essentially equating the “lingua grammatica” to Latin, the *De vulgari eloquentia* reconstructs the dichotomy to demonstrate a broader, more theoretical interpretation of the term “grammar.” In the first book of the *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante compares the vulgar tongue to a “locutio secundaria nobis, quam Romani gramaticam vocaverunt” (“another kind of language, at one remove from us, which the Romans called *gramatica* [grammar]”).¹¹ However, this secondary language is not Latin per se; he claims that not only did the Romans possess this tongue, but the Greeks as well as many other populations when he writes, “Hanc quidem secundariam Greci habent et alii, sed non omnes: ad habitum vero huius pauci perveniunt, quia non nisi per spatium temporis et studii assiduitatem regulamur et doctrinamur in illa” (“The Greeks and some—but not all—other peoples also have this secondary kind of language. Few, however, achieve complete fluency in it, since knowledge of

¹⁰ Benamati, Stigliani, and Querini all include scenes of Nimrod's Tower of Babel in their Columbus epics.

¹¹ Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. Sergio Cecchin (Milan: UTET, 1983), 1.1.3. The English translation is taken from *De vulgari eloquentia*, trans. Steven Botterill (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3.

its rules and theory can only be developed through dedication to a lengthy course of study").¹² Dante uses the term "gramatica" to mean any ideal, stable, *rule-based* language which contrasts the ever-evolving nature of its corresponding vernacular. His "gramatica" therefore implies temporal permanence, as it is an antithesis to change and mutability. It represents by its very nature stability and order, and it achieves a sort of perfection through rigidity.

It is this association between grammar and fixity that seems to appeal to some writers in the Cinquecento and Seicento. In the Cinquecento, participants in the *questione della lingua* struggle to apply this rigidity and order to the vernacular, hoping to precisely define and freeze in time the spoken language and seeming to deny its state of constant flux. From this perspective, the very premise of the *questione della lingua* seems paradoxical as it is a movement which seeks to stabilize that which is fluid, and firmly fix that which does not stop evolving. This characteristic of the *questione della lingua* in the Cinquecento—one which the Seicento does not share to the same degree—seems unavoidably connected to the contemporaneous era of expansion and discovery. Grammar, the act of *correcting* linguistic errors, becomes a means of controlling the *errantia* that has brought changes unwelcome to many in Europe.

Pietro Bembo and the Historia Veneziana

Within two decades of the 1492 publication of the *Gramática de la lengua castellana* by Antonio de Nebrija, the first published European grammar manual with wide dissemination, Italian grammar manuals abound. But it is Pietro Bembo's *Asolani* in 1505 and the overdue publication of his *Prose della volgar lingua* in 1525 which clarify the terms and the stakes of the *questione della lingua* in Italy. The first thoroughly formulated Tuscan-Italian grammar manual, the *Prose* elucidate the rules for a written and spoken Italian based not only on the Tuscan dialect, but on that of the Trecento writers Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Longing for an illustrious and independent vulgate on which to establish the glory of Italy in an age when it is suffering the occupation of foreign realms,¹³ Bembo insists upon a language which rests on the literary tradition and fame of the Trecentisti.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See Carlo Dionisotti's introduction to Pietro Bembo, *Prose e rime* (Turin: UTET, 1971), 43.

However, the subjugation of the spoken living language to a resurrected grammar for the *letterati* appears out of sync with the age of discovery and reveals not only a denial of the ever-changing picture of reality in the Cinquecento, but an aversion to experiential knowledge by dismissing the growing need for language to be able to express new ideas, new discoveries, and even previously un contemplated lands and peoples. Although Bembo does not directly address the relationship between language and the age of discovery, his conflicting feelings about the voyage of Christopher Columbus and the concept of “otherness” are revealed in the *Historia Veneziana*.¹⁴

Book 6 of the *Historia Veneziana* (1544–46) provides the earliest indication of an Italian linguist treating the subject of Christopher Columbus's voyage. Venetian officials were unhappy with the drafts of the *Historia* produced by the poet and official historiographer for the Republic, Andrea Navagero.¹⁵ When Bembo reluctantly took over the post upon Navagero's death in 1529, he bore the task of rewriting the *Historia* virtually from scratch. In a 1529 letter to his friend, Venetian geographer and New World historian Giovan Battista Ramusio, Bembo conveys his hesitation to take on the heavy burden of writing the *Historia*, citing his advanced age (he was about to turn sixty years old) in hopes of being excused from this call to duty.¹⁶ Despite his initial reluctance, Bembo ultimately produced twelve books for the Republic.

At the beginning of book 6, Bembo discusses Portuguese and Spanish explorations west and south. Although brief, his treatment of these explorations is significant for the way in which he characterizes the journey of Christopher Columbus as an “evil” upon Venice: “In questo tempo

¹⁴ The only work known to me that discusses Bembo's treatment of the New World discoveries is Daria Perocco, “Un male non pensato: Pietro Bembo e la scoperta dell'America,” in *L'impatto della scoperta dell'America nella cultura veneziana*, ed. Angela Caracciolo Aricò (Rome: Bulzoni, 1990). This article, which provides great historical detail about the provenance of this project from its inception to its completion by Bembo, confirms that Bembo translated his Latin version of the *Istorie veneziane* between 1544–1546, without assistance and without elaborating upon or modifying them. For this reason, I have chosen to rely on an Italian edition of the *Historia*, *Della historia vinitiana di M. Pietro Bembo Card. volgarmente scritta libri XII* (Venetia: per Giordano Ziletti, e compagni, 1570).

¹⁵ Andrea Navagero (1483–1529) was a poet and later the official historiographer of the Republic who played an important role in the literature of discovery, as he translated into Italian a part of Pietro Martire d'Anghiera's *De orbe novo* as well as the *Sumario de la natural y general historia de las Indias* by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdez, the first two histories of the New World discoveries. See Perocco, “Un male non pensato: Pietro Bembo e la scoperta dell'America,” 283.

¹⁶ Pietro Bembo, Letter 85, *Opere in volgare*, 734.

ritrovandosi la città per tanti incomodi afflitta, & travagliata; un'altro non pensato male da lontane regioni le sopravvenne" ("Shaken by these setbacks, the city suffered an unexpected misfortune at the hands of distant peoples and lands").¹⁷ The "non pensato male," or "unexpected misfortune," is, in fact, the discovery of new lands under the direction of "Colombo Genovese huom di vivo ingegno" ("Columbus [...], a man from Liguria with a sharp mind").¹⁸

What could prompt the learned Bembo to view the events of the Age of Discovery in such a negative light? Providing a historical summary that actually conflates the expeditions of Portugal with those of Spain, Bembo describes his understanding of the events:

Perciò che per lettere di M. Piero Pasqualico Ambasciator della Rep. appresso ad Emanuele Re di Portogallo, hebber i Padri notitia; quel Re havere alla fine trovato il camino di condurre le mercatantie dell'Arabia & dell'India per l'Oceano di Mauritania, & de Getuli, spesse volte dalle sue navi tentato: . . . Et perciò stimavano i Padri dovere di necessità avvenire, che essendo dato di ciò il modo, & la facultà alli Spagniuoli, i nostri cittadini per lo innanzi dovebbono havere piu ristretto campo da essercitarsi nelle loro mercatantie: & quelli grossi guadagni, che haveano la città arricchita in dando ella quasi a tutto il mondo le cose dell'India, le mancherebbono. Di questa novella i Padri non picciola noia sentirono: della qual noia essi nondimeno co guadagni & avanzi de gl'altri popoli si racconsolavano. Et pensavano, amabile & cara cosa di vero essere, doversi ritrovare a nostri tempi nuove regioni, & quasi un'altro mondo, & genti nascoste & separate.¹⁹

The fact that Bembo first considers the discoveries a misfortune for the Venetian economy, only later to reveal his wonder at such a find, reflects his perspective as a loyal factotum of the Republic. Bembo understands

¹⁷ Pietro Bembo, *Della Historia Vinitiana* (Venetia: per Giordano Ziletti e compagni, 1570), 73v. The English translation is taken from Pietro Bembo, *History of Venice*, ed. and trans. Robert W. Ulery Jr. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), vol. 2, 87.

¹⁸ Pietro Bembo, *Della Historia Vinitiana*, 73v; *History of Venice*, vol. 2, 87.

¹⁹ Pietro Bembo, *Della Historia Vinitiana*, 73v. "The senators were informed by letter of Pietro Pasqualigo, ambassador at the court of King Manuel of Portugal, that the king had at last discovered and explored routes through the West African ocean for the transport of goods from Arabia and India, something his ships had repeatedly attempted. . . . Now that the Iberians had got this ability, it was inevitable that our citizens would have to conduct their trade on a smaller and more restricted scale, and our city would lose those vast profits which had made Venice wealthy by carrying Indian spices more or less throughout the world. The receipt of this news caused the senators no little distress of mind, though the gains accruing to other people brought them some consolation. At the same time it provoked this further reflection, that it was really a fine thing to acquire new lands—almost another world—and to place on record peoples who had been concealed and cut off from us." *History of Venice*, vol. 2, 87.

that the journeys of the Portuguese and Spaniards resulted in merchant trade which would strike a blow to the pivotal occupation of the Venetians, who had pioneered many of the trade routes with the East. After espousing the appropriate position of disappointment on behalf of the "Padri" of the Republic, however, he changes tone and along with those "Padri," reveals his awe regarding the discovery of new territories in their day and age. He begs the reader's patience while he digresses from the history of Venice briefly to discuss the events:

Et poscia, che a questo luogo il corso della mia historia m'ha condotto; stimo convenevole essere, per quanto la dispositione di questa impresa permette, brevemente raccontare, quale di questo fatto, che di tutti quelli, che alcuna età ha giamai veduti, è il maggiore, & il piu bello; fosse il cominciamento; & anchora qual parte della terra, & quai genti, & con quai costumi siano state trovate. Era Colombo Genovese huom di vivo ingegno. . . .²⁰

The greatest occurrence "che alcuna età ha giamai veduti" begins almost as a fairy tale centered on the hero Columbus and the stories of the exotic peoples and customs of the islands he found; the author describes the dress, diet, relationships, and religion of the inhabitants and the topography of the islands, having drawn information from various published sources including those of his friends Ramusio and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdez. He alludes to the circumnavigation of the globe by Magellan and his crew, but rather dispassionately, no longer discussing the implications of these expeditions on Venice.

Although Bembo quickly adopts a reportage prose style, the reader cannot help but remember the initial appraisal by Bembo-historian of "unexpected misfortune" and wonder whether Bembo-poet-linguist may have cause to view the Age of Discovery in general in this same light. Among his scholarly pursuits, Bembo maintained an active interest in geography and cartography²¹ and befriended and corresponded with several New World historians in addition to Ramusio and Navagero, including Oviedo,

²⁰ Pietro Bembo, *Della Historia Vinitiana*, 73v. "And now that the course of my narrative has brought me to this point, I think it is not out of place to give a brief account, as far as the plan of my work allows, of how this all began, the greatest and most splendid achievement that any age has seen accomplished by man, and then of the areas of the earth and the nations and their customs that were thereafter discovered." *History of Venice*, vol. 2, 87.

²¹ Perocco believes that Bembo's request to Ramusio to borrow Ptolemy's *Geographia* from the Biblioteca di San Marco, as well as another letter to Ramusio correcting his error in nautical leagues testify to the linguist's attention to and interest in geography. See Perocco, "Un male non pensato: Pietro Bembo e la scoperta dell'America," 286–287.

Pietro Martire, and Girolamo Fracastoro, who dedicated to Bembo his poem *Syphilis* about the "New World disease" afflicting Europeans. It is possible that such friendships inspired Bembo's interest in the material and study of the New World. But Bembo is a scholar who in many ways never truly embraces scientific thought and who does not treat the scientific nature of Columbus's journey in his discussion. In fact, Bembo does not even discuss the implications of the discovery other than on the Venetian economy. Rather, Bembo's interest in and perhaps even concern about the figure of Columbus lies in what kind of philosopher he must have been in order to have thought possible the expedition in the first place. Such thinking, it appears to Bembo, requires the dismissal of the wisdom of the ancients regarding the scope of the world and the size of the ocean. Bembo begins his brief account with a description of the idea with which Columbus traveled to Spain in hopes of sponsorship:

Costui; si come suole essere l'humano animo desideroso di nuove cose; a Ferdinando & ad Isabella Re di Spagna propose, & mostrò loro vana favola degli antichi essere, & divisione da nulle vere ragioni sostentata & confermata; quello, che tutta quasi l'antiquità ha creduto; cioè cinque essere le parti del cielo: delle quali la mezzana da calori, le due ultime & estreme da freddi siano in maniera vitiate; che quelle parti della terra, che sotto queste sono, le quali sono altrettante, habitar da gli huomini non si possano: & due solamente tra queste tre sotto quelle stesse parti del cielo poste, potersi habitare.²²

From this passage, it is clear that Bembo's interest lies less in the discovery of Columbus than in the fact that, in order to arrive at it, Columbus must have questioned, challenged, and overturned the traditional wisdom of antiquity. As Bembo explains, Columbus convinced the royals that the belief of the ancients in uninhabitable regions of the world was worthy of reevaluation. Bembo elaborates that Columbus believed "che'l globo della terra era di tale qualità, che a gli huomini non era tolto il potere per tutte le parti di lei gire & passare" ("the terrestrial globe was so made that men

²² Pietro Bembo, *Della Historia Vinitiana*, 73v–73r. "In line with the appetite of the human heart for fresh discoveries, Columbus expounded and explained to the Spanish sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabella, that the almost universal belief of antiquity—that there are five regions of the sky, of which the middle is afflicted by such heat and the two extremes by such cold that the corresponding climate zones of the earth beneath them are uninhabitable by mankind, and that only the two intermediate zones set under the corresponding parts of the sky are habitable—was a foolish fable of the ancients, and a description neither based on nor confirmed by any well-founded theory." *History of Venice*, vol. 2, 87–89.

had the faculty of traveling through every part of it")²³ and he concludes: "Quello, che gli scrittori Oceano chiamarono, non essere di vana & ignara grandezza: ma pieno d'Isole, & di luoghi habitati da gli huomini" ("What writers have called the Ocean is not a vast emptiness, but is full of islands and places inhabited by men").²⁴ For a classicist such as Bembo, admission of the fallibility of the ancients could perhaps be a disturbing notion, and one which might aid in an assessment of the magnitude of a "non pensato male."

Whereas Bembo describes the originality and the radicalness of Columbus's vision with respect to the knowledge of the ancients, he also seems to leave the door open to an ancient intuition of the existence of the New World when he speaks of "la openione di Colombo . . . laquale nondimeno prima di Possidonio philosopho discepolo di Panetio, & dapoi etiandio d'Avicena medico grande & illustre truovo essere stata" ("I see it was much earlier the idea first of the philosopher Posidonius, the pupil of Panaetius, and then of the famous physician, the great Avicenna").²⁵ Perhaps finding a precedent for Columbus's viewpoint among ancient philosophers is Bembo's way of "domesticating" such an unthinkable historical development, or perhaps it is Bembo's attempt to demonstrate the relevance and value of ancient wisdom in a time of so much uncertainty. Nonetheless, Bembo's claim that the ancients may have intuited the presence of other peoples and lands shows his unwillingness to categorically refute them. By insisting on the possibility of this ancient intuition of the New World, Bembo deprives Columbus of being a scientific thinker, one whose observations of the world around him could have led him to question ancient authority. Bembo's analysis renders Columbus instead a classical thinker who studied carefully the texts of the ancients.

At this critical juncture in time, scholars like Bembo must decide whether to ignore the new or expand their worldview, thereby rejecting the philosophies of the ancients, most of whom had not anticipated the possibility of lands, languages, and peoples unknown to the Old World. At the same time, Christians had to find a way to assimilate these New World inhabitants into the framework of Christianity and they sought an explanation for the prolonged post-lapsarian, pre-redemptive state of these island peoples: why had the salvation of Jesus Christ not been offered to

²³ Pietro Bembo, *Della Historia Vinitiana*, 73v–73r; *History of Venice*, vol. 2, 89.

²⁴ Pietro Bembo, *Della Historia Vinitiana*, 73r; *History of Venice*, vol. 2, 89.

²⁵ Pietro Bembo, *Della Historia Vinitiana*, 73r; *History of Venice*, vol. 2, 89.

them?²⁶ Several writers took on the weighty questions which the discoveries of Columbus instigated.

In his *Terzo Volume delle Navigazioni et viaggi* . . . , Bembo's friend Giovan Battista Ramusio reveals his own polemical feelings as he, on the one hand, clings tightly to the belief that the ancients had intuited the presence of a more numerous human race and on the other, acknowledges their mistake. He begins the introductory *Discorso* with the assertion that in the *Timaeus*, Plato was long misunderstood as having spoken only allegorically about the presence of other lands when he was actually speaking the truth:

la verità è questa, che havendo Platone a scriver della fabrica del mondo, il qual teneva essere stato fatto per collocarvi l'huomo animal divino, . . . gli pareva cosa pur troppo fuor di ragione, che due parti d'esso fossero habitate, & l'altre prive d'huomini: e'l Sole, & le Stelle con loro splendore facessero la metà del corso indarno, & senza frutto, non lucendo se non al mare, & a luoghi deserti, & privi d'animali.²⁷

On the same page, Ramusio confesses, "siamo chiari come sotto la nostra tramontana, & sotto la linea dell'equinottiale vi siano habitatori, & che vivano così comodamente, come fanno l'altre genti nel rimanente del mondo, la qual cosa gli antichi negarono" ("we are certain that there are inhabitants beneath our *tramontana* and beneath the equinoctial line, and that they live as comfortably as the other peoples in the rest of the world, a fact which the ancients denied").²⁸ Although the authority of Plato stands firm, Ramusio must concede that there are truths the possibility of which the ancients had flatly denied.

In his *Ragguagli di Parnaso*, Traiano Boccalini equivocates about the understanding that the ancients had of the New World. In *Ragguaglio* 90

²⁶ For more information about the assimilation of the New World natives into the Christian brotherhood and into the picture of Christianity, see John Elliott, "Renaissance Europe and America: a Blunted Impact?" in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. Fredi Chiappelli (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 17–21.

²⁷ Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Terzo volume delle Navigazioni et viaggi nel quale si contengono Le Navigazioni al Mondo Nuovo, alli Antichi incognito, fatte da Don Christoforo Colombo Genovese* . . . (In Venetia nella Stamperia de Giunti: 1556), 3v. "The truth is this, namely, that for Plato, having written about the making of the world, which he held to have been fashioned in order to place therein the divine animal that is man, . . . it seemed too far beyond the scope of reason that two parts of the world were inhabited and the others uninhabited; and that the sun and the stars with all their splendor made half of their journey in vain, illuminating only the sea and lifeless desert places."

²⁸ *Ibid.*

about Columbus, Vespucci, Magellan, Cortés, and other discoverers, Boccalini firmly states that with regard to the habitability of the torrid zone,²⁹ “il grande Aristotile infinitamente è rimasto confuso” (“the great Aristotle was deeply mistaken”) and along with him, “tutta la scuola filosofica” (“the entire philosophic school”).³⁰ He continues, “Per le quali novitadi venne in chiara cognizione delle molte menzogne che ed egli e altri filosofi avevano pubblicate della zona torrida” (“Through which novelties came to light the many lies that he and the other philosophers had diffused regarding the torrid zone”).³¹ Whereas Boccalini is unrepentant in his criticism of Aristotle, however, he is unwilling to dismiss the judgment of all the ancients—even those correct by chance—as unscientific prognostication. Boccalini claims that Seneca anticipated the discovery of the New World: “Seneca il tragico per immortal sua gloria . . . ispirato da divino furor poetico, più di mille e quattrocento anni prima co’ suoi famosi versi aveva predetto tanto scoprimento” (“to his immortal glory . . . , inspired by divine poetic frenzy, the tragedian Seneca had predicted this discovery in his illustrious verses more than a thousand years earlier”).³²

An acknowledgement of the limitations of the scientific understanding of the ancients seems less painful for some authors than it is for Bembo, Ramusio, and Boccalini. For example, Francesco Guicciardini, Florentine historian and political theorist, discusses the journey of Christopher Columbus in two distinct episodes in his *Storia d'Italia* (1561). He devotes book 2, chapter 13 to the “male francese”—its symptoms, origin, and circulation throughout Europe. In this chapter, Guicciardini attributes both the cause and the cure of syphilis to sexual contact between the sailors of Columbus and the New World natives during the Italian’s four journeys. He treats the topic of Columbus’s discovery and its impact more thoroughly in book 6, chapter 9, entitled “Commercio de’ portoghesi coll’Oriente e danno derivatone a’ veneziani. Cristoforo Colombo e la scoperta delle nuove terre a occidente. Errori degli antichi rivelati dalle nuove scoperte” (“The Trade of the Portuguese with the Orient and the harm derived therefrom to the Venetians. Christopher Columbus and the discovery of the new lands in the West. Errors of the ancients unveiled by the new

²⁹ The torrid zone is the area between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, corresponding roughly to the area between 23°28’ north and south of the equator.

³⁰ Traiano Boccalini, *Ragguagli di Parnaso e pietra del paragone politico*, ed. Giuseppe Rua (Bari: Giuseppe Laterza & Figli, 1912), vol. 2, 298.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 299.

³² *Ibid.*

discoveries").³³ Like Bembo, Guicciardini conflates the expeditions of the Portuguese with those of the Spaniards, but views them all from the Venetian perspective in his role as historian. And as Bembo does, Guicciardini notes the economic harm which these expeditions caused Venice. However, he is more willing than Bembo to definitively reject the authority of the ancients in the matter of geography, as evidenced by the title of his chapter. In the beginning of the chapter, Guicciardini refutes the ancient myth that the torrid zone is uninhabitable to man and that Calcutta is unreachable by ship: "Queste opinioni e presuppositi essere stati falsi ha dimostrato a' tempi nostri la navigazione de' portogallesi" ("The ongoing navigation of the Portuguese has shown these opinions and presuppositions to be false").³⁴ He restates plainly his feeling at the conclusion of the chapter, asserting "Per queste navigazioni si è manifestato essersi nella cognizione della terra ingannati in molte cose gli antichi" ("Through these navigations it has been shown that the ancients were mistaken regarding much of their knowledge of the earth").³⁵ Unlike Bembo, Ramusio, and Boccalini, however, Guicciardini candidly addresses the theological implications of the discoveries and questions the reliability of the Bible which did not, as the Psalms had claimed, spread the Word of God to the ends of the earth:

[questa navigazione ha dato] qualche ansietà agli interpreti della scrittura sacra, soliti a interpretare che quel versicolo del salmo³⁶ [Ps.18.5], che contiene che in tutta la terra uscì il suono loro e ne' confini del mondo le parole loro, significasse che la fede di Cristo fusse, per la bocca degli apostoli, penetrata per tutto il mondo: interpretazione aliena dalla verità.³⁷

Guicciardini seems to be alone in his willingness to challenge the fallibility of the Bible; other writers do not mention such implications.³⁸

³³ Francesco Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia* (Milan: Garzanti, 1988), vol. 1, 640.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 641.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 644.

³⁶ Here, Guicciardini makes reference to Psalm 18:5: "Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth: and their words unto the ends of the world."

³⁷ Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, vol. 1, 644–645. "[this navigation has caused] some anxiety for interpreters of sacred Scripture, who are accustomed to interpreting that verse of the psalm [Ps. 18.5], which reads that their sound has gone forth into all of the earth and their words to the end of the world, to mean that the faith of Christ, through the mouths of the apostles, had penetrated the entire world: an interpretation contrary to truth."

³⁸ Although this article focuses on Italian writers who discuss the discoveries in light of the ancients, I would like to mention the influential opinions of two non-Italians. On Aristotle's knowledge of the New World, see Bartolomé de Las Casas *Apologética historia sumaria* (Mexico: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas de la Universidad Nacional

Like Guicciardini, who clinically and without compunction challenges both texts of secular and divine authority, Anton Francesco Doni points to the errors of the ancients with rebellious fervor. By the mid sixteenth century, Doni has embraced the new reality of Europe and not only feels comfortable doing battle with the ancients, but scorns them as victims of an unenlightened, unscientific time, leaving them behind in an effort to reformulate new theories for this new era. In the *Mondi* (1552), he elaborates his vision of the spheres of existence, and freely postulates about the endless intellectual possibilities that have opened because of the knowledge gained by the new experiences on the Ocean: “pure vi furon alcuni, sì ben curiosi come me, i quali dissero: ‘Chi sa che non si trovi il modo di salire ne’ cieli sì come s’è trovato la via d’andare agli antipode’” (“yet there were some, who were as curious as myself, who said, ‘Who knows if they will find a way to reach the sky as they found the way to the antipodes’”).³⁹

The radical Doni does not express any anxiety about rejecting the ancients and their wisdom. Rather, he simply looks forward to a future in which curiosities may be investigated freely and without intense concern for tradition; his is a scientific perspective which imagines the possibility of discovery through experiential and experimental means. Praising his own age in which all sciences have arrived “quasi a perfezione,”⁴⁰ Doni goes further than to confute the ancients; he actually *mocks* them when he says, “In quei primi secoli si viveva alla sbraccata, senza che ci entrasse la vergogna fra noi a romperci il capo, passavano le giornate senza pensieri, facendo proprio come i bambini, che non si curano di mostrare ciò che gli hanno e di dormire alla scoperta” (“In those first centuries men lived free of cares; without the shame by which we are undone, they spent their days without distress, behaving like children who are not ashamed to show their nakedness and to sleep out in the open”)⁴¹ This is perhaps the boldest rejection of the authority of antiquity thus far. Clearly, Doni is deeply impressed by the scientific age in which he lives; but with this utter dismissal of the ancients, he is perhaps among the first to defini-

Autónoma de México, 1967), vol. 2, 35. However, Michel de Montaigne adamantly declares the error of the ancients in *Des Cannibales* when he asserts that the New World is not the prognosticated Atlantis, nor is it any other place of which the ancients were aware. See Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. Claude Pinganaud (Paris: Arléa, 2002), 154.

³⁹ Anton Francesco Doni, *I mondi e gli inferni*, ed. Patrizia Pellizzari (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1994), 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

tively leave them behind. With such a derisive view of the authority of the past, Doni does something else as well: he heralds the defiant and unruly Seicento. As fervent as Doni's criticism is, even he cannot imagine the backlash against tradition—particularly against the Italian Trecentisti—which the upcoming century would inaugurate. Despite the dramatic change in tone, however, the *questione della lingua* in the Seicento not only endures but finds new vigor. A concrete cultural phenomenon and a symbol of Italian pride and identity, language becomes a battleground for traditionalists and rebels, and for those who disdain boundaries as well as for those who embrace them.

A New Century: The Seicento and Secentismo

In the Cinquecento the *questione della lingua* and the understanding of the Columbus journey appear as two parallel intellectual phenomena; in the Seicento, however, these two parallel paths converge and become inextricably intertwined as linguists begin to write (and some indeed will only *begin* to write) about the journey of Columbus. The notion of language and the effect of the journey on language infiltrate the epic, which becomes a platform both for heroifying an Italian national figure and for exposing linguistic and nationalistic concerns. But why do these paths intersect?

At the beginning of the Seicento, there is a shift in thinking; no longer a subject reserved for historical discourse, the Columbus enterprise is adapted by poets. In 1596 with the *Mondo nuovo* of Giovanni Giorgini, Christopher Columbus becomes the subject of a poem for the first time since the work of Giuliano Dati announcing his discovery. Whereas the Dati poem of 1493 cast into *ottava rima* the announcement of the Genoese but did not fictionalize it,⁴² Giorgini's poem casts the journey of Columbus as an epic one and employs the *topoi* of war, love, and the forces of heavenly good and demonic evil. The journey of Columbus has finally become literary domain. The shortcoming of the Giorgini epic, however, with regard to the epic characterization of Columbus is that, although it fictionalizes Columbus, it does not go so far as to make him the hero of the text. Rather, the poem recounts the second voyage of Columbus to the

⁴² Giuliano Dati, *Lettera dell'isole che ha trovato nuovamente il re di Spagna. Poemetto in ottava rima di Giuliano Dati, pubblicato per cura di Gustavo Uzielli* (Bologna: Presso G. Romagnoli, 1873).

new islands and places King Ferdinand of Spain on the journey, focusing on him, rather than on Columbus, as the protagonist and innovator of the enterprise. The three epics that follow Giorgini's—those of Villifranchi, Benamati, and di Somma—share the distinction of being abandoned within the first few *canti* and published in incomplete form. However, Benamati along with Tommaso Stigliani, who would publish a completed *Mondo nuovo* in 1628, Alessandro Tassoni with *L'Oceano* (1622), and later Alvise Querini with *L'Ammiraglio delle Indie* (1769) all weave lengthy discourses about language and grammar into their Columbus narratives.

It is important simply to note here the great difference in the urgency with which historians and poets treat the Columbus discoveries. Although histories of Columbus's and others' voyages of discovery appeared in the Cinquecento shortly after the voyages to the New World, for example, the histories of Pietro Martire in 1511, Ramusio, and the monumental work of Fracanzano Montalboddo in 1507,⁴³ the first epic about the subject emerges over one hundred years after Columbus's initial voyage. In *Cristoforo Colombo nella poesia epica italiana* (1891), Carlo Steiner postulates various reasons for the delayed literary interest in Columbus's voyage in Italy. Among them, he claims that Italians did not realize initially that Columbus was one of their own, that the discoveries contradicted the teachings of Seneca (resulting in a propensity to ignore them), and that the islands found were disappointing in their resources and so were not interesting to an economically- and commercially-minded society.⁴⁴ An attitude of fear or even the sentiment shared by Bembo that these discoveries were an unwelcome "male" may be at work, or perhaps there is something about the adventurous, temerarious Seicento which finally permits poets to explore with candor the various facets, good and bad, of this event.

Another shift occurs in the Seicento with regard to the *questione della lingua* as it witnesses a vigorous backlash against the ideas of Bembo and the cult of Petrarch. While the Cinquecento expressed a high regard for order and for precepts, the Seicento embraces the chaotic and the undefined. With the Seicento come the Baroque excesses of writers like Marino

⁴³ The *Itinerarium Portugallensium e Lusitania in Indiam et Inde in Occidentum et demum ad aquilonem* is the better known title of the 1508 Latin edition. It is the first printed collection of voyages and an extremely early account of the first three voyages of Columbus and the third voyage of Vespucci in 1501–2. The 1508 edition also includes the first-known map of Africa depicted as entirely surrounded by ocean.

⁴⁴ See Carlo Steiner, *Cristoforo Colombo nella poesia epica italiana* (Voghera: Premiata Tipografia Successori Gatti, 1891), especially 5–10.

and Stigliani as well as the desire to contradict and overthrow the restrictive, rigid, and outmoded language advocated by Bembi. Seventeenth-century thinkers go beyond rejecting the wisdom of the ancients; rather, poets like Alessandro Tassoni actively work to tear down the ancients and replace their wisdom with that of the modern age. An "uncouth iconoclastic demon,"⁴⁵ the Seicento dramatically changes the view of the past and the approach to language. In fact, in many ways, the Seicento becomes a crossroads of order and confusion for both language and culture. The exaltation of linguistic order and stability as well as of classical ideals in the Cinquecento is replaced by the glorification of rulelessness and a fascination with novelty that comes to define the Baroque. Thinkers begin to turn their backs on Bembo and on the classical ideals that he and his reverence of Petrarch implicate.⁴⁶ A rebellious time, the Seicento rails against order and values the irregular, the exceptional, and the chaotic in architecture, art, literature, and even language. This century actively seeks to disparage and strip the ancient philosophers and the Italian Trecentisti of their centuries-long dominion over thought and style and at times even to distort the classical into a parody of itself. Central to this effort is the destruction of the classical hierarchy which states that there are revered authorities and masters in all areas—art, literature, grammar—and that those are to be honored at all costs.

The Cinquecento and Seicento reconcile in dramatically different terms the disparity between the wisdom of the ancient philosophers and the experiential knowledge of modern explorers. Whereas Cinquecento poets and historians such as Bembo, Ramusio, and Boccacini struggle to find common ground between modern reality and the "truth" offered by the ancients, Doni and Tassoni gladly dispense with the notion of the authority of the ancients. For those skeptical of abandoning the past, such as Bembo, as well as Columbus epic poets such as Benamati and Stigliani, the formulation of a rule-guided grammar for the Italian language is the

⁴⁵ Bruno Arcudi refers thus to the Seicento, adding that the century was "both violent and overzealous. It turned on all that had existed before it, denying the validity successively of classical antiquity, the Middle Ages, and even the more recent high Renaissance, numbering among its victims Aristotle, Homer, Plutarch, Dante, Ariosto, [and] Machiavelli." "The Author of the *Secchia* Does Battle with Pietro Bembo's School," *Italica* 44:3 (Sept. 1967): 291.

⁴⁶ With the help of Alessandro Tassoni, the spirit of "Bembian" reverence for Petrarchan form suffers a backlash in the seventeenth century. Bruno Arcudi notes in his article that while the sixteenth-century saw one hundred sixty seven publications of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, the seventeenth century saw a mere seventeen. Bruno Arcudi, "A Seicento View of the *Divine Comedy*," *Italica* 43:4 (Dec. 1966): 333.

establishment of an absolute truth in a time of uncertainty, and an almost moral standard to which language can be held. An immutable grammar is a means of designating not only stability but right from wrong in a changing world; it is an ethical rubric which identifies both that which is linguistically incorrect (*error*) and that which is unstable and in motion (*errar*). Although the expansion of the known world evades control, language is tangible and can be honed, polished, and righted. The authority of the classical world, threatened by the journey of Columbus, can perhaps be salvaged through the codification of the spoken and written word.

PART TWO

POLITICAL FOUNDATIONS

THE DIPLOMATIC GENRE BEFORE THE ITALIAN LEAGUE: CIVIC PANEGYRICS OF BRUNI, POGGIO, AND DECEMBRIO

Michael Komorowski*

The historiography of Quattrocento diplomacy has focused largely on the forty years of the Italian League (1455–94) and its aftermath. The Italian League was the result of careful diplomacy among the five major Italian powers in establishing a lasting peace treaty. One of the upshots of this work was the introduction of the concept of a balance of power among the major Italian states. This was a period of relative peace and freedom from non-Italian interference in peninsular affairs, a period that sixteenth-century historians, especially Guicciardini, would look upon with considerable nostalgia as they compared its calm to the wars of their own time. Yet the half-century preceding the creation of the Italian League, by comparison, has been relatively little studied in terms of its diplomacy. Scholarship on early modern diplomacy, almost invariably, has chosen 1450 as a starting point.¹ There is good reason for this chronology since it is only after mid-century that resident ambassadors become permanent fixtures

* All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own. I have transcribed the Latin texts as they are printed, except that I have silently regularized *i/j* and *u/v* as well as emended typographical contractions such as *-ē* and *-ū* to *-ae* and *-um*. I am grateful for the wise and generous counsel of Francesca Trivellato and David Currell while revising this essay.

¹ See Gary Ianziti, *Humanistic Historiography under the Sforzas: Politics and Propaganda in Fifteenth-Century Milan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Franca Leverotti, *Diplomazia e governo dello stato: I "famigli cavalcanti" di Francesco Sforza (1450–1466)* (Pisa: GISEM-ETS, 1992); M. S. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450–1919* (London: Longman, 1993); Riccardo Fubini, *Italia quattrocentesca: politica e diplomazia nell'età di Lorenzo il Magnifico* (Milan: Angeli, 1994); and Daniela Frigo, ed., *Politics and Diplomacy in Early Modern Italy: The Structure of Diplomatic Practice, 1450–1800*, trans. Adrian Belton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Vincent Ilardi reproduced the diplomatic correspondence between Milan and France and Burgundy beginning in 1450: Paul M. Kendall and Vincent Ilardi, eds. and trans., *Dispatches with Related Documents of Milanese Ambassadors in France and Burgundy, 1450–1483* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1970–71), and Vincent Ilardi and F. J. Fata, eds. and trans., *Dispatches with Related Documents of Milanese Ambassadors in France and Burgundy, 1450–1483* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1981), vol. 3. The microfilm project that he directed likewise begins in mid-century. All of these works follow the broad parameters of Garrett Mattingly's classic study, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955). Mattingly sees the period before 1455 in Italy as one of transition in which the diplomatic conventions of the following centuries begin to take shape.

in the major Italian city-states, but it would be a mistake to ignore the forms of diplomatic action before the formation of the league because of the period's almost non-stop war and chaotic foreign policy.²

It is true that surviving diplomatic correspondence between the chanceries of the northern city-states is much more abundant after 1450. We need therefore to look outside of the traditional archive of sources if we want to recover a diplomatic heritage for the period preceding the formation of the Italian League. One of the places to which we can turn is the developing genre of the short oration modeled on classical precedents that praised particular social, political, and economic attributes of the Italian city-state. The attempts of these civic panegyrics to place their cities in an international context and their later circulation at various ducal courts suggest that these texts aimed not simply to express the preeminence of their subjects but to demonstrate that diplomatic ties ought to be a natural consequence of the emergence of the state.

The most widely studied of these orations is Leonardo Bruni's (ca. 1369–1444) *Laudatio Florentinae urbis* (1403 or 1404), which inaugurated the genre of civic panegyric during this period. The text is instantly familiar to historians in its role as the centerpiece of one of the most influential explanations of Quattrocento classicism in Italy, Hans Baron's "civic humanism." In his classic work, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (1955), Baron laid out a vigorous theory for the development of the particular brand of republicanism that developed in the early fifteenth century at Florence, which he termed civic humanism.³ For Baron, civic humanism was born out of the nexus of three forces that emerged in Florence around

² Vincent Ilardi, writing of the two decades in Milan before Filippo Maria's death, 1427–47, finds that this time "can only be described as a period of almost continuous war or preparations for war" with no established "foreign policy." See his "Quattrocento Politics in the Treccani *Storia di Milano*," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance* 26 (1964): 162–90, rpt. in Vincent Ilardi, *Studies in Italian Renaissance Diplomatic History* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1986), 171–72.

³ Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966; originally published in 2 vols., 1955). Baron first used the term "civic humanism" (*Bürgerhumanismus*) in 1925, but it was not until the publication of the first edition of *The Crisis* in 1955, in which he fully explained his argument and its implications, that the term gained wide currency. For an account of Baron's career and particularly his early influences, see Riccardo Fubini, "Renaissance Historian: The Career of Hans Baron," *Journal of Modern History* 64 (1992): 541–74. For a summary of the fortunes of the "Baron thesis" in the historiography since the publication of *The Crisis*, see James Hankins, "The 'Baron Thesis' after Forty Years and Some Recent Studies of Leonardo Bruni," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995): 309–38.

1400: classical scholarship, civic participation, and nationalism. The last of these, a patriotic or nationalist fervor, Baron attributed to the invasions of Florence by the belligerent Giangaleazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan. The year 1402 was the moment of crisis when it appeared for a few months that Giangaleazzo's army was on the verge of conquering Florence and subjecting the city to the monarchical authority of Milan. Baron assumed rather uncritically that Giangaleazzo represented the forces of tyranny and that Florentines recognized this and saw not only their livelihoods at stake but, crucially, their brand of political liberty. For Baron, it was not only the wars of Giangaleazzo's time but the "crisis" year, especially, that galvanized humanist scholars at Florence to connect their scholarly work to their public life. They theorized republican institutions only because republicanism was under immediate threat.

Baron's argument has been widely criticized in the half-century since it first appeared, although it remains one of the most influential conceptual models for understanding the connections between classical learning, humanists, and contemporary politics. Though Baron had wanted to claim Bruni's work as "our most eloquent witness to the profound influence which the defense of Florentine independence against Giangaleazzo exerted on the strengthening of Florentine republican sentiment," subsequent historiography has largely distanced itself from the single-minded ideological direction that he charted for Bruni.⁴ Mikael Hörnqvist summarizes the discomfort of many historians when he argues that civic humanism, far from defending republican liberty, in fact promoted Florentine imperialism at the beginning of an expansionist phase in the early fifteenth century.⁵

I would like to take the observations of Baron and of his critics about Florence around 1400 in a different direction: the intersection of classical scholarship, civic participation, and nationalism also points to a developing literature of diplomacy as Italian city-states become more self-conscious about the implications of their forms of government beyond their city walls and as other European powers largely leave Italy to its own devices during most of the Quattrocento. In a book that first appeared in the same year as Baron's, Garrett Mattingly hinted at some of the possibilities of Baron's approach for reconstituting developing diplomatic

⁴ Baron, *The Crisis*, 448.

⁵ Mikael Hörnqvist, "The Two Myths of Civic Humanism," in James Hankins, ed., *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 105–42.

networks at the time.⁶ These two historians had discussed their respective book projects with one another and subsequently ratified each other's scholarship. Mattingly wrote an adulatory review of *The Crisis*, while Baron dedicated the second edition of his work to Mattingly's memory.⁷ Modern diplomacy for Mattingly began when states realized their place in secular history as autonomous entities distinct from the body of Christendom. It was less a moment of crisis than the slow development of the state as an increasingly powerful entity in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries that made the need for diplomacy apparent. Although uncomfortable with the implications of the Burckhardtian relationship between a Renaissance zeitgeist and the emergence of the state—"the state as a work of art" in his classic formulation—Mattingly at the same time recognized that the self-conscious artificiality of the state had had something to do with the innovation of resident ambassadors and the first truly modern diplomacy.⁸ Ambassadors at this time, after all, were both public orators and cunning intermediaries for their masters. Although Milanese antagonism toward foreign governments in the years leading to the peace of Lodi in 1454 is as close to a catalyst as Mattingly is willing to identify for this process, diplomacy remained for him a key barometer of the steady cultural and political maturation of the state that began in Renaissance Italy and then spread beyond the Alps.

While Mattingly's arguments have remained largely uncontested (mostly through a relative lack of historiographical interest), Baron's have sustained significant criticism.⁹ To summarize broadly, historians have disagreed with Baron's formulation of civic humanism as an essentially republican phenomenon, but acknowledge that he was right to argue that humanists' learning had political and cultural consequences for the societies to which they belonged. But the dynamo of civic humanism need not be the opposition of Milanese tyranny to Florentine republicanism either in 1402, when Giangaleazzo threatened the city, or in the 1430s, when Filippo Maria posed somewhat less of an immediate threat. By that time, Florence was already a good deal less republican than it had been thirty

⁶ Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*.

⁷ Garrett Mattingly, [untitled review], *Political Science Quarterly* 71 (1956): 314–15.

⁸ Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 55–63.

⁹ For a recent critique of Mattingly, see John Watkins, "Toward a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38 (2008): 1–14. For a lucid account of Baron's importance in Quattrocento historiography, see Christopher S. Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance: Humanists, Historians, and Latin's Legacy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 36–39.

years earlier. James Hankins and others have criticized the dichotomy between “tyranny,” on the one hand, and “republicanism” or “liberty,” on the other, as an ineffective tool for evaluating the complex intersections of humanist learning and republicanism. Civic humanism has also tended to color our understanding of diplomacy in the early Quattrocento as little more than rhetorical posturing. One can too easily dismiss Florentine-Milanese relations in the first half of the century as essentially antagonistic: the cities were at each other’s throats more often than not. Even if it is perhaps a bit premature to be applying the diplomatic standards of the time of the Italian League to the years immediately preceding it, there were sustained efforts at diplomatic solutions to long-term political rivalries even in these years. The correspondence and literary publications of leading humanists suggest as much.

Christopher Celenza has written recently that the closer one reads the work of humanists “the clearer it becomes that their communities were bounded not only or even primarily by geography or local politics, but also by the blurry, sometimes ephemeral borders of the republic of letters.”¹⁰ Celenza criticizes the limitations of Baron’s conclusions as he suggests the possibilities of an approach to Quattrocento humanism that would integrate literary communities with something like Mattingly’s conception of the development of international embassies. A truer measure of the influence of Bruni’s *Laudatio*—and those civic panegyrics that followed his—on politics in Florence and abroad can only be gauged at some distance from the actual event of the writing itself.

It will become apparent in the course of my argument that I am advancing a version of civic humanism as well, albeit rather significantly altered from the form that Baron gave it. By looking at two humanists writing in the tradition of Bruni’s *Laudatio*—the cornerstone text of Baron’s thesis—we can begin to understand a bit better some of the varied applications to which the genre of civic panegyric was put in this time. The *Laudatio* came to be read both in Florence and elsewhere in northern Italy, I argue, in light of diplomatic concerns, and the genre of civic panegyric turned out to be surprisingly capacious when it came to articulating the diplomatic functions of the state. These diplomatic functions could be as varied as the perennially shifting network of state alliances before the

¹⁰ Christopher Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance*, 119. In a footnote, Celenza justifies his use of the term “republic of letters” by citing a 1417 letter between Francesco Barbaro and Poggio Bracciolini in which Barbaro terms humanist interaction as a “literary republic” or “republic of letters” (*litterarie rei p.*).

formation of the Italian League in 1455, but an overriding concern among humanists working from the legacy of the *Laudatio* was in addressing the foreign audience who would read their literary output. My aim is to track the intersection of the demand for civic panegyric and the increased need for inter-Italian diplomacy; in the process, I hope to show why this intersection adds to our understanding of humanism in the Quattrocento and what about that humanism might still be called civic. Claims that civic panegyric is mere rhetorical grandstanding for a domestic audience and is primarily intended to gain favor for its writer are not adequate to account for the diplomatic function of these works.¹¹ By examining two such writers who worked under very different conditions, we can gain a better understanding of both the reception of Bruni's *Laudatio* and of the pre-Italian League efforts at diplomacy among northern Italian cities.

One of the brightest and most prolific writers of Milan during this period, Pier Candido Decembrio (1399–1477), spent most of his career serving the “tyrant” dukes of Milan, though he was also employed by the short-lived Ambrosian Republic. He worked as Filippo Maria Visconti's secretary from 1419 until the latter's death in 1447 and was often sent on diplomatic missions abroad. His work has received more attention in recent years as historians have begun to realize the significance of the contributions of humanists working outside the confines of republican institutions.¹²

The case of Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459) is of particular interest, for he was born a Florentine, but beginning at the age of 23, he worked as a secretary in the Curia for a half-century, often residing in Florence during his tenure. Poggio's work did not always serve the “republic” of Florence nor did it always show him to be a committed republican. Although he remained on good terms with the Medici, it was not until Carlo Marsupini's death in 1453 that Poggio succeeded to the office of Chancellor in Florence.

¹¹ See Jerrold E. Seigel's argument that the *Laudatio* was written as a demonstration piece of a rhetorician searching for employment, “‘Civic Humanism’ or Ciceronian Rhetoric? The Culture of Petrarch and Bruni,” *Past and Present* 34 (1966): 3–48. For Baron's response to this argument, see Hans Baron, “Leonardo Bruni: ‘Professional Rhetorician’ or ‘Civic Humanist’?” *Past and Present* 36 (1967): 21–37.

¹² See discussions of Decembrio in Riccardo Fubini, *Umanesimo e secolarizzazione da Petrarca a Valla* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1990), 77–135, and Ronald G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 484–89, as well as certain essays in the collection of proceedings of a conference held in Pavia and Vigevano in May 2000, Mario Vegetti and Paolo Pissavino, eds., *I Decembrio e la tradizione della Repubblica di Platone tra medioevo e umanesimo* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2005).

Both Decembrio and Poggio wrote civic panegyrics while employed in the chanceries of their respective cities and followed the model that Bruni had pioneered at the beginning of the Quattrocento. In the *Laudatio* the young and then-unimportant Bruni extols Florence not only as a model city but as the exemplar of civilization and culture in the known world. The hyperbolic praise he lavishes on the city's geographic location, its people, and its government presupposes comparisons with other cities, particularly Florence's neighbors. He offers Florence as a model for the rest of the world to imitate. At times, Bruni adopts an avuncular tone as if addressing the casual tourist: "Sive enim antiquitate delecteris. . . . Sive novitatem queris. . ." ("If you are interested in things from antiquity. . . [o]r if you are looking for contemporary architecture. . .").¹³ Elsewhere, Bruni plays the master painter instructing his students in the art of perspective: "Quare et ville longinquos aspectus, et suburbia villas, et urbs ipsa suburbia pulcritudine vincit" ("The closer you come to this city, the greater grows your appreciation of its magnificence. Thus the villas are more beautiful than the distant panorama. . .").¹⁴ Bruni is not claiming to portray Florence as it is, but rather he asks his readers to view the city through a series of sequential vantage points. It is the relationship of Florence vis-à-vis the viewer that interests Bruni in this text; this is not a vacuum-sealed portrait of a city intended only for consumption by the Florentine elite. James Hankins's examination of surviving manuscripts confirms that the *Laudatio* circulated well beyond Florence and probably enjoyed modest popularity.¹⁵

There is some evidence to suggest that Bruni reissued the *Laudatio* in 1434; in any case, by the following year, Decembrio had discussed the work with Lorenzo Valla, who found Bruni's tract to be intellectually deficient.¹⁶ He urged Decembrio to reply and by the end of 1435, or perhaps the beginning of the following year, Decembrio had published an oration,

¹³ The most reliable edition of this text in Latin is in Hans Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni: Studies in Humanistic and Political Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 232–63, 235. For Bruni's *Laudatio*, I cite from the translation, *Panegyric to the City of Florence*, in Benjamin G. Kohl and Ronald G. Witt, eds., *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 135–75, 138–39.

¹⁴ Bruni, *Laudatio*, 238; *Panegyric*, 142.

¹⁵ For a brief review of the provenance of the manuscripts, when known, see James Hankins, "Rhetoric, History, and Ideology: The Civic Panegyrics of Leonardo Bruni," in James Hankins, ed., *Renaissance Civic Humanism*, 143–78, 147–49.

¹⁶ Hankins notes that a manuscript in the Archivio di Stato in Turin contains a subscription with Bruni's name and a date of 1434, suggesting that Bruni may have republished the

De laudibus Mediolanensium urbis panegyricus. Although Valla may have been the catalyst for the composition of this text, Filippo Maria must also have found the work politically useful. Decembrio had spent much of 1435 traveling in Germany and Flanders on a number of diplomatic missions for his employer, and it seems reasonable to conclude that this work was a continuation of these diplomatic duties. To be sure, Decembrio's panegyric was a direct response to Bruni, but he drew on several native Milanese models as well.¹⁷ Although Decembrio takes up many of Bruni's observations about Florence and then asserts the same or better of Milan, the *Panegyricus* is not simply a point-by-point demolition of Bruni's argument. Decembrio's text diverges from the *Laudatio* both in its more theoretical examination of the political philosophy of Milanese government and especially in its emphasis on Milan's military might.

The passage of the *Panegyricus* most often cited by historians of political thought contains a review of Plato's five regimes which he outlined in *The Republic*. Decembrio argues that Florence's government is inferior to that of Milan because it is an oligarchy. Milan, on the other hand, can trace its lineage to founders "qui non tam opum acquisitione solliciti, quam glorie et posteritatis memores" ("who were not as preoccupied with acquiring wealth as they were with the memory of glory and of posterity").¹⁸ The Florentines are simply out to make money, while Milan has adopted a "timocracy," a government that is founded on martial honor.¹⁹ Decembrio cites Plato as his authority that a timocracy is the best form of government realistically possible, suggesting that the Milanese understanding of politics is savvier than the idealism with which Bruni describes Florence. Whereas Bruni had appealed to an ideal Aristotelian state that furnished corporeal and external goods, Decembrio resituates those values in a Platonic context. He was in the midst of translating Plato's *Republic* (and would dedicate the work to Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, the former dedicatee of Bruni's translation of Aristotle's *Politics* before Bruni rescinded

work at that time (ibid., 149). For Valla's letter to Decembrio, see Ottavio Besomi and Mariangela Regoliosi, eds., *Laurentii Valle Epistole* (Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1984), 161–63.

¹⁷ Two anonymous narrative poems, *Versum de Mediolano civitate* (eighth century), *De situ urbis Mediolani* (tenth century) may have inspired Decembrio, and Bonvesin da la Riva's *De magnalibus Mediolani* (1288) was certainly an influence.

¹⁸ I have used the edition found in Pier Candido Decembrio, *De laudibus Mediolanensis urbis panegyricus*, in Attilio Butti et al., eds., *Petri Candidi Decembrii opuscula historica*, in *Rerum Italicarum scriptores*, n.s., vol. 20.1 (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1925–58), 1013–25, 1017.

¹⁹ For a reading of the *Panegyricus* as a straightforward argument for the benefits of a monarchy, see Ronald Witt, "Cino Rinuccini's *Risponsiva alla Invettiva di Messer Antonio Lusco*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 23 (1970): 133–49, 147–48.

the dedication in favor of Pope Eugene IV), and by demonstrating how both the governments of Florence and Milan descend from Platonic political theory, he establishes a common civic genealogy for the cities.²⁰ The line between timocracy and oligarchy is not rigid in this text (for Plato, oligarchy is the next best form of government after timocracy), perhaps because Decembrio assumed that he would be susceptible to attack if he had claimed that Milan did not in any way resemble an oligarchy.

Throughout the text, Decembrio subordinates the oligarchic tendencies of Milanese government to the larger role that Milan plays in northern Italian affairs. Remembering the generation before the present time, he writes of Giangaleazzo Visconti,

Tulit hic princeps complurima bella, contra validissimas Italie urbes vires suas movit, nec tamen quispiam inventus est, qui consilio, potentia, opibus huiusce conatibus opponere, aut que animo conceperat quominus ut exqueretur ullo pacto quiverit obsistere. Nempe cum adversus Florentiam urbem bellum gereret, que inter ceteras Italie opulentissima quodammodo ac preclara habebatur, nec facile appareret eius vim ac potentiam brevi posse prosternere, cum utique finitimorum auxilio tuta esset, ne propinquas solum, sed exteras quoque nationes exciret, adeo virtute, diligentia urbem sagacissimam elusit atque prostravit, nunc armis imminendo, nunc pacem ostentando.²¹

Certainly, his claim that Florence is wealthy “in a certain way” borders on snide, and the reminder that Giangaleazzo gravely threatened Florentine autonomy could hardly be taken very charitably by that city and her allies. But Decembrio stresses the diplomatic maneuvering more than the military exercises of Giangaleazzo. The duke was ready to use means that were adaptable to specific situations. In short, Giangaleazzo keeps all options open. There is a certain frankness here that is completely absent from Bruni’s text. Bruni, for instance, patently lies in the *Laudatio* when he claims:

²⁰ For a summary of the circumstances of Decembrio’s translation of the *Republic*, see James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), vol. 1, 124–54.

²¹ Decembrio, *De laudibus*, 1017. “This prince carried on several wars, and he commanded his forces against the most powerful cities of Italy, yet no one was found who by counsel, might, or wealth could oppose his projects, or who could resist by any means whatever course he set his mind to undertake. To be sure, when he waged war against the city of Florence, which among all the other cities of Italy was regarded as remarkable and, in a certain way, the most wealthy, it did not appear that his strength and power could easily or quickly overthrow it. This was because Florence was made secure by the aid of neighbors and called out not only to nearby cities, but also to foreign nations. Even so, he beat back and subdued by virtue and diligence the wisest city, sometimes by threatening with arms, sometimes by offering peace.”

Nunquam enim tulit iniurias aliarum urbium, neque otiosam spectatricem se prebuit aliene calamitatis. Sed primum omni studio conata est verbis et auctoritate rem componere inimicitiasque sedare et pacem, si fieri posset, suadere. Quod si convenire non potuit, ei semper parti opitulata est cui a potentioribus inferebatur iniuria.²²

Florence offered no such aid to neighboring cities that had been formerly under Giangaleazzo's rule but since his death had fallen under the control of various *condottieri*.²³ By acknowledging that Giangaleazzo was essentially a diplomatic pragmatist Decembrio does not, however, retreat from his assertion that morality motivates foreign policy decisions. Decembrio subordinates the good of any one city—even the wealthiest and wisest—to the necessity of keeping foreign invaders out of Italy. Giangaleazzo let nothing hinder his ability to guard Italy against its enemies and as Decembrio reminds us at several points in the panegyric, his son Filippo Maria will do the same.

The most important component of this farsighted statecraft is Milan's efficient government bureaucracy. In a subsequent passage, he details the city's wealth much more explicitly and concretely than Bruni had in the *Laudatio*. He tells us that during the rule of Giangaleazzo, officials collected 45 million ducats in taxes very efficiently, a third of which came from the city of Milan itself.²⁴ It is inconceivable that Decembrio would offer such a vulgar display of his city's wealth immediately after criticizing Florence on this very premise if he did not intend to put that wealth at the service of a larger point. The tax collection is a bureaucratic as much as an economic triumph. One component of Decembrio's argument for

²² Bruni, *Laudatio*, 252. "Florence has never tolerated injuries to other cities, nor has it ever allowed itself to be an idle onlooker while other states were in trouble. First Florence always tries with all its might and moral authority to settle disputes through negotiations and, if it can, to reconcile differences to persuade the parties to make peace. But if this cannot be accomplished, Florence always aids the weaker party, which has been threatened or harmed by the more powerful." *Panegyric*, 160.

²³ Hankins cites Cremona, Crema, Brescia, and Parma as cities whose calls for help Florence ignored in the year or two following Giangaleazzo's death. See James Hankins, "Rhetoric, History, and Ideology," 162n.

²⁴ "Memini me audivisse a viro questorio huius aule in primis docto, cum illo referret divo principe Johanne Galeaz, de quo supra retuli, imperante, quinquies et quadragies decies centena millia [i.e., ducats] parvo admodum temporis spacio ab his exacta, qui ducalium reddituum curam haberent. Huius tertiam totius summe Mediolanum impendisse. . . ." ("I remember that I heard from a bureaucrat who was very familiar with the ducal exchequer, when he reported on that late prince Giangaleazzo, of whom I have recounted above, that he commanded those who were in charge of the ducal revenue to raise just about 45 million [ducats] in a short space of time. Milan laid out a third of this sum . . ."). Decembrio, *De laudibus*, 1020.

timocracy highlights the fact that the Milanese have managed to establish a well-ordered state apparatus. In an age in which tax collection could be spotty and the burden of payment unevenly distributed between rural and urban locales, Decembrio lauds the Milanese state for its fairness, thoroughness, and competence. It is precisely this sort of even-handedness and efficiency that Decembrio emphasizes when discussing Milan's foreign policy, as in the passage discussing the war against Florence. Both the *Laudatio* and the *Panegyricus* present arguments for their respective city's superiority, but while Bruni's offers an exclusive vision of preeminence, Decembrio finds that Milanese greatness can be coextensive with that of her rivals. In addition, Decembrio's pride in the efficiency of the tax collection and in the sum collected substantiates the tacit assumption in this oration that Milan plays Sparta to Florence's Athens. Bruni's classical model had been the second-century *Panathenaicus* of Aelius Aristides, itself an imitation of Isocrates's panegyric of the same name. The comparison is therefore a natural one for Decembrio, but he succeeds in making it while also suggesting that Milan's role is far greater than simply that of Florence's principal antagonist.

Indeed, one of the major differences between Decembrio's panegyric and Bruni's is the extent to which Decembrio places Milan within a northern Italian political and geographic context. Bruni tends to refer to features of the native Tuscan landscape when describing the vicinity of Florence while Decembrio, though he makes reference to corresponding features in praising Milan, draws links with specific Italian cities, notably a long history of (often aggressive) interaction with Venice. Milan's location on a plain between two rivers situates the city in space and in history: "Non iniuria itaque veteres Mediolanum inde appellatum putant, quod inter amnes media, veluti Mesopotamie regio, sita est" ("And therefore the ancients do not think it is unjust to call this place 'Mediolanus,' because it lies between rivers, just as the Mesopotamian region is situated").²⁵ Decembrio goes on to attribute the city's economic strength as a center for wool manufacture and export (*lanificii et mercemoniorum vim*) and its military might (*armatos duces, stipatas equitum peditumque catervas*) to its favorable location.²⁶ Specifically, Decembrio is matching Bruni's argument that Florence's position "ab utroque litore remota est" ("equidistant

²⁵ Ibid., 1019. Mediolanus actually means "in the middle of the plain," but Decembrio has just discussed the state's boundary between the rivers Adda and Ticino.

²⁶ Ibid., 1019.

from either [Italian] coast") affords the city the most advantageous geographical situation possible.²⁷ But it is Decembrio who reads economic and political implications into Bruni's text. By highlighting Florence's distance from the coast, Bruni hopes to show that Florence's location inland near fertile fields is more conducive to good public health than a seaport's. Decembrio, too, notes that Milan's geographic situation contributes to the good health of its citizens, but he follows the implications of this observation much further than Bruni. Good health is not an end in the way that it is for Bruni, but rather the means for a strong military. This assertion then leads to the final and longest part of the *Panegyricus*, in which Decembrio describes a series of battles in which Milan has prevailed. But Decembrio's intent in enumerating these victories is not only to demonstrate the city's martial prowess but also to argue for Milan's relevance and indeed preeminence as a mediator. Again, Decembrio responds to Bruni's assertion that Florence sends "legationes ad conciliandos animos, ubicunque ira efferbuit, demissas, qua quidem in re hec civitas suam promptissime semper interposuit auctoritatem" ("embassies . . . wherever trouble has broken out to reconcile opposing viewpoints, for indeed this city has always been very prompt to use its authority in reconciliation").²⁸ This is probably the only sentence of the *Laudatio* that refers explicitly to the (semi-fictional) diplomatic endeavors of the Florentine government upon which Bruni does not elaborate, claiming lack of sufficient space in which to treat the subject adequately. But by drawing attention to Florence's primacy among cities—particularly to this version of an ideal, fictionalized Florence—Bruni implicitly argues for interstate relations, even if in the ideal world of the *Laudatio* the traffic flows in one direction. Florence stands as a beacon at which the world marvels and strives to imitate but remains, as Decembrio's reading suggests, an incomplete model.

Decembrio imitates that model when he describes Milan, but adds historical instances of the Milanese superintendence of Italian affairs. In treating the example of Milanese relations with Genoa, he asks rhetorically, "Quinam illius, ut aiunt, novi electi tumultum concitavit, ut Liguriam deleret, urbem istam penitus excideret? Qui denique Gallorum formidabilem excivit adventum, dum comes Armeniacus nova loca novasque sedes in Italiam quereret?" ("[w]hich of [the foreign powers], as they say, stirred up the confusion of the new elections in order to destroy Genoa and bring

²⁷ Bruni, *Laudatio*, 243; *Panegyric*, 148.

²⁸ Bruni, *Laudatio*, 252; *Panegyric*, 160.

down that city from within? Who, then, prompted the worrisome arrival of the French, when the Count of Armagnac was seeking new conquests in Italy?"²⁹ Decembrio alludes to the ten changes of the doge that Genoa experienced between 1390 and 1394 before the city was brought under French domination. Milan eventually conquered Genoa in 1409 and made it a satellite of the duchy. Decembrio is duly laudatory of his city's military glory, but he stresses here that it was the Genoese who invited the Milanese and, further, that Milan's actions in Genoa are part of a tradition of expelling foreign invaders from Italy. Earlier, Decembrio had recounted the Lombards' successful repulsion of Frederick Barbarossa's troops in the twelfth century.

Clearly, diplomacy is on Decembrio's mind when discussing Genoa. In 1435, the same year or the year before he composed the panegyric, Decembrio had written to the Genoese to persuade them to enter into a military pact with Filippo Maria against Venice. Decembrio reminds them of their past martial power and of their victorious expeditions against the Pisans. This letter must have been less than successful, for the Genoese revolted against Milanese rule after Filippo Maria had released Alfonso of Aragon (later king of Naples) and his brother, whom a Genoese admiral had taken prisoner in a naval battle in August 1435. Apparently, the Genoese felt cheated out of a substantial ransom.³⁰ Decembrio's *Panegyricus* is an official, public response to Genoese grievances that downplays Milanese aggression against the city by subordinating that aggression to the importance of a more cohesive notion of northern Italian collective action.³¹ But the *Panegyricus* does not seek to redress Genoese grievances; it is not addressed to the Genoese. It does, however, situate Milano-Genoese relations within the larger struggle for a balance of power in Italy, most specifically by applying this history to the threat of Venetian territorial encroachment. Milan had lost the cities of Brescia and Bergamo to Venice

²⁹ Decembrio, *De laudibus*, 1023. The Count of Armagnac, Jean III, was defeated at Alessandria in 1391 by *condottieri* in the service of Giangaleazzo.

³⁰ This summary of Milano-Genoese relations is taken from the thorough overview of Decembrio's life and work in Mario Borsa, "Pier Candido Decembrio e l'umanesimo in Lombardia," *Archivio storico lombardo*, ser. 2, 10 (1893): 5-75 and 358-441, 16-17.

³¹ For a very brief summary of the question of dating the *Panegyricus*, see Vittorio Zaccaria, "Sulle opere di Pier Candido Decembrio," *Rinascimento* 7 (1956): 13-74, 21-22. Zaccaria draws on the scholarship of Giuseppe Petraglione in assigning the *Panegyricus* to the latter months of 1435. See his "Il 'De laudibus Mediolanensium urbis panegyricus' di P. C. Decembrio," *Archivio storico lombardo*, ser. 4, 8 (1907): 5-45.

after the battle of Maclodio in 1427, and Filippo Maria worried that Venice's ambitions in Lombardy were still greater.

Decembrio's tract counters these ambitions both by attempting to curry favor with potential allies and by casting Venetian conquests as self-aggrandizing seizures of power against Milanese military exploits that seek only to protect Italy. At the moment the panegyric was written, Alfonso of Aragon was striving to secure the throne of Naples, which Queen Giovanna II had promised him when she named him her heir in 1421. A rival claimant to the throne, René d'Anjou, maintained that Giovanna's will had named him her heir. He was supported by the Neapolitans and until 1435 by Filippo Maria. Pope Eugene IV, however, backed Alfonso. None of these facts are present anywhere in the *Panegyricus*, but they need not be, for the details of the struggle for the Neapolitan succession would have been familiar throughout Italy. Filippo Maria's previous support for René d'Anjou is excised from the historical record, which suggests that Milanese diplomacy at this stage was concerned with a pragmatic overture—or at the very least, a testing of the waters—toward the formation of an anti-Venetian league. With Alfonso and the Papacy already enemies of Venice, it might take relatively little persuasion on Filippo Maria's part to convince them of an alliance with Milan.³²

Such an anti-Venetian league never formed (Filippo Maria once again turned against Alfonso in 1442 when the latter had secured the crown of Naples and had grown too powerful in his former supporter's eyes), but the diplomatic afterlife of the *Panegyricus* continued for some time. Although no manuscript of the *Panegyricus* has yet been found that dates from the Visconti era, the later distribution of surviving manuscripts of the *Panegyricus* suggests that both the Milanese government and Decembrio himself found it a useful text. Borso d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, received versions in Latin and in the vernacular, probably in the early years of the Italian League. The panegyric continued to circulate in Milan as well. Another manuscript contains a dedication to Galeazzo Maria Sforza, duke of Milan, 1466–76.³³

³² On this possibility, see Riccardo Fubini, "The Italian League and the Policy of the Balance of Power at the Accession of Lorenzo de' Medici," in Julius Kirshner, ed., *The Origins of the State in Italy, 1300–1600* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 166–99, 171.

³³ Paul Oskar Kristeller, ed., *Iter Italicum: A Finding List of Uncatalogued or Incompletely Catalogued Humanistic Manuscripts of the Renaissance in Italian and Other Libraries* (London: Warburg Institute and Leiden: Brill, 1963–97), vol. 1, 316; vol. 5, 231. Petraglione suggests that Decembrio wanted to return to favor under the Sforza. See Giuseppe Petraglione, "Il 'De laudibus Mediolanensium urbis panegyricus'," 25–26.

The *Panegyricus* is less an example of partisan propaganda than it is a sincere attempt to participate in an intellectual dialogue that Decembrio regards Bruni's text as having initiated. The occasion for writing his panegyric for Milan may indeed have been the reissuing of Bruni's *Laudatio* in or around 1434, but Decembrio's purposes were surely more complex than simply a refutation of Florentine preeminence. His aim is not to demolish the work of Bruni and the idealized vision he gives of Florence, but to generalize that vision and to apply that generalization to a wider geographical and political context than Bruni had envisioned. Bruni's *Laudatio* is not wrong, but incomplete, the *Panegyricus* suggests. Decembrio maintains a scrupulous respect for Florence and does not descend to the level of hurling insults to which rival humanists could descend.³⁴

In 1438, Decembrio drafted a letter from Filippo Maria to Poggio Bracciolini, who had spent much of the latter half of the 1430s in Florence.³⁵ The letter reads much like a recapitulation of Bruni's *Laudatio* and is, in many ways, contradictory to the material of the *Panegyricus*.³⁶ After praising Florentine architecture and urban design, the letter continues, assuring Poggio that the Milanese will do everything possible to aid Florence:

Ad quorum quidem non laudem solum sed utilitatem ac protectionem status rerumque suarum, personam, opes, facultates, denique (quo nihil antiquius nobis est) inconcussam fidem pollicemur et omnia ipsis grata offerimus leto corde, dispositi quecunque facere, ex quibus honos decusque succedat florentissime urbi vestre, cuius solidam ac felicem exoptamus libertatem.³⁷

³⁴ I have discussed two of the Milanese responses to Bruni's claims of both geographical and historical preeminence and of superior government for Florence. One might add a third area of critique, that of classical scholarship. Though Bruni's text takes as its model Aelius Aristides's *Panathenaicus*, Bruni is less attentive to citing classical sources—and particularly Greek sources—than Decembrio. John Onians has argued that Decembrio's antagonism toward Bruni focused on the latter's supposedly deficient knowledge of Greek literature. See his "Alberti and ΦΙΛΑΡΕΤΗ: A Study in Their Sources," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 34 (1971): 96–114.

³⁵ Decembrio spent 1425–26 in Rome and probably first met Poggio there. Their intermittent correspondence in the following years shows them to be on good terms.

³⁶ Baron takes a similar view in *The Crisis*, 408. His opinion stems from nineteenth-century historiographical assessments, such as Ferdinando Gabotto's assertion that the letter revealed "l'acrobatismo e la ginnica pieghevolezza degli umanisti" or Giuseppe Petraglione's less charitable conclusion that the letter is an example of "la doppiezza sfrontata della diplomazia viscontea" (both quoted in "Il 'De laudibus Mediolanensium urbis panegyricus,'" 25). Baron would agree with them, but he goes beyond these judgments by reading this letter as essentially a forceful defense of Florentine liberty.

³⁷ For the text of this letter, see Poggio Bracciolini, *Lettere*, ed. Helene Harth (Florence: Olschki, 1984–87), vol. 2, 314–17, 317. "Not for . . . praise alone, but for the advantage and protection of [the Florentine] position and its business, we promise our person, works,

The dichotomy between the urban beauty of Florence and Milan is a false one, certainly, just as is Baron's Florentine republicanism and Milanese tyranny. Decembrio makes these claims while writing in the genre of panegyric but, as we have seen, he is sensitive to diplomatic concerns throughout his work. Bruni constantly refers to the "freedom of the Florentines [*summa libertate*]" and Decembrio, in repossessing the term, recalls his model as he expands the definition of liberty. *Libertas* in this letter is not exactly civic freedom so much as it is self-sufficiency in economic and military affairs. Decembrio can show Milanese admiration for Florence by repossessing a Florentine term in a way that explains its special application in Milan.

Poggio's reply two months later is in the same vein, praising Filippo Maria as the guarantor of Italian security, "in quo prisca illa virtus ac probitas Italarum relucet" ("in whom shines again that ancient virtue and honesty of the Italians").³⁸ Although James Hankins has characterized this exchange as an example of "rhetorical games" of regime "propagandists," it nevertheless exemplifies the use of oratorical skill, similar to that found in civic panegyric, for potential diplomatic ends.³⁹ Indeed, Poggio argues that serious matters of foreign relations lie beneath all of the rhetoric of returning praise in kind:

Nam cum exquisitis verbis Florentinam urbem adeo graviter copioseque laudaris, ut nihil fere amplius ab homine amicissimo dici potuisset, maximum erga eam videris benivolentiae testimonium pre te ferre. Adde, quod non solum laudes nostras prosequeris elegantissime sed etiam tuum in nos amore profiteris tuerisque nos veluti propria in causa ab eorum vulgo qui cecos appellant Florentinos.⁴⁰

resources . . . and finally, an unshakable pact. We offer everything they desire with a glad heart, ready to do anything necessary, from which honor and distinction may follow to your most flourishing city, whose firm and happy liberty we eagerly desire."

³⁸ Ibid., vol. 2, 318.

³⁹ James Hankins, "Humanism and the Origins of Modern Political Thought," in Jill Kraye, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 118–141, 122. Elsewhere, Hankins discusses the same letter in passing and suggests that there may be something "noteworthy" about the exchange. See James Hankins, "De republica: Civic Humanism in Renaissance Milan (and other Renaissance signories)," in Mario Vegetti and Paolo Pissavino, eds., *I Decembrio*, 485–508, 486–87. Hans Baron read Poggio's response straightforwardly, but argued that Poggio was defending the particular brand of Florentine *libertas* in the face of what must have been a letter of suspicious intentions. See Hans Baron, *The Crisis*, 408–09.

⁴⁰ Poggio, *Lettere*, vol. 2, 319. "Since you have praised with exquisite words the city of Florence so solemnly and profusely so that even the friendliest person could say nothing more, you seem to bear before you the greatest testimony of benevolence toward her.

Poggio goes on to recount the past relations between Florence and Milan in which “non odio aut crudelitate certatum extitit” (“no hate or cruel struggle existed”).⁴¹ Poggio juxtaposes the Milanese nobility (*maiores tuos*) with Florentine republican citizens (*florentinos cives*), but suggests that the forms of government have little to do with the question of whether a profitable relationship can be established between the two cities. The formulaic elements of this letter (such as when Poggio closes by saying that Filippo Maria should “count him among his followers”) are a part of, rather than a distraction from, the seriousness of this letter’s purpose.⁴² Poggio does not hint at any idea of a military alliance (which would have been extremely unpopular, in any case, in Florence), but rather strives for a kind of alliance in an intellectual war. The enemies of Florence in this letter are not foreign invaders, but rather those who slander the city, or “call the Florentines blind,” in the formulation that Poggio has repeated from Decembrio’s letter. As we have seen in the case of the *Panegyricus*, Decembrio’s work places the Florentine and Milanese governments within a unified political genealogy highlighting more similarities than differences between the cities. Poggio recognizes this purpose in Decembrio’s panegyric and letter and acknowledges the possibility of more definite diplomatic relations at some future time. Poggio would recall the value of this strategy when he published his panegyric to Venice, *In laudem reipublicae Venetorum*, in 1459, at the very end of his life.⁴³ But before we turn to this work, it will be necessary to track briefly the development of Poggio’s political thought in the years before he wrote his panegyric on Venice.

Poggio had laid out some of the theoretical foundations for the assertions that he makes in the *In laudem* nearly two decades before in his dialogue on the nature of nobility, in which he imagines a conversation between his friends Niccolò Niccoli and Lorenzo de’ Medici, the brother of Cosimo. In this work, *De vera nobilitate*, which he wrote in late 1439 or early 1440, Poggio attempts to resolve whether nobility is a condition

What is more, you not only continue our praises most elegantly, but also you acknowledge your friendship for us and defend us even in our own cause against those who call the Florentines blind.”

⁴¹ Ibid., vol. 2, 319.

⁴² “Vale, princeps inclite et me in tuorum numerum ascribe.” Ibid., vol. 2, 323.

⁴³ The generally accepted date for the composition of this work is 1459, following the assessment of Ernst Walser, although Nicolai Rubinstein argues based on a paleographical analysis that it was likely composed in 1449. See Ernst Walser, *Poggius Florentinus: Leben und Werke* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1914), 291, and Nicolai Rubinstein, “Poggio Bracciolini cancelliere e storico di Firenze,” *Atti e memorie dell'accademia Petrarca di lettere, arti e scienze di Arezzo* 37 (1965): 215–33.

that must be based on lineage and wealth.⁴⁴ Lorenzo largely argues that it must, while Niccoli counters that wealth is corrupting and that an illustrious lineage will tell one almost nothing about the quality of the man who descends from it. Near the end of the dialogue, Niccoli offers a definitive statement of his position:

Est enim nobilitas quasi splendor quidam ex virtute progrediens, qui suos possessores illustrat ex quacumque conditione emergentes. Nam virtus maiorum, principatus, gloria certaminum et gestarum rerum illorum bona sunt, illos ornant et insignes reddunt, qui ea sibi suo labore, sua industria peperere. Nos vero laudem et nobilitatem meremur nostris meritis, non alienis, et iis actionibus que ex nostra prodeunt voluntate.⁴⁵

Niccoli asserts the independence of nobility from the social order by using Plato against Lorenzo's Aristotelian assertion that nobility is based on the inheritance of wealth and social standing which he derives from the *Politics*. In short, whereas Aristotle predicated nobility on *genus*, Niccoli, following Plato, finds the key measure to be *virtus*, a quality that arises in the ideal life, which combines humanistic learning and public benevolence. The dialogue is most certainly not an attack on Lorenzo, for it is on precisely these elements of *virtus* that Poggio praises Lorenzo de' Medici in his funeral oration for him, written after his death in September 1440. Lorenzo's virtue undergirds his public displays of benevolence and justice, Poggio recounts in the oration. Lorenzo's death is truly a loss to the city,

Nam iustitia ea est virtus quae omnes reliquas complectitur. Nulla enim civitas, nulli hominum coetus, nulla societas absque iustitia potest constare diutius. Emolumentum quidem rerum publicarum est, & humani divinique iuris conservatrix.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ In a letter to Francesco Pizolpasso, the Archbishop of Milan, of 24 February 1440, Poggio describes the dialogue as "composed but not yet edited." For the letter, see Poggio, *Lettere*, vol. 2, 359–62.

⁴⁵ Poggio Bracciolini, *De vera nobilitate*, ed. Davide Canfora (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2002), 31. "For nobility is almost like a brightness coming forth out of virtue which illuminates its possessors regardless of their social standing. For the virtue of the noble, their dominion, the glory of contests and accomplishments are their goods; those things adorn them and confer distinction to those who by their own labor and industry have gained them. Truly, we earn praise and nobility by our merits, not others', and by those actions that follow from our own will."

⁴⁶ Poggio Bracciolini, *Oratio . . . in funere Laurentii de Medicis*, in Riccardo Fubini, ed., *Opera omnia* (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmio, 1964–69), vol. 1, 278–86, 284. "For justice is that virtue that encompasses all others. This is because no city, no class of men, no society can last long in the absence of justice. Indeed, it is an advantage to states and the guarantor of human and divine right." Frederick Krantz notes that Poggio makes a similar argument in his very brief treatise *Oratio in laudem legum*. See his "Between Bruni and Machiavelli:

The *Oratio in funere Laurentii de Medicis*, like its precursor in the genre, Bruni's funeral oration for Nanni Strozzi, is an exercise in civic panegyric.⁴⁷ Lorenzo's death is a blow for Florence because his generosity has been taken away from the city, but the virtue he embodied is enshrined in the city itself.

Poggio is largely able to praise the Florentine state in this oration because of Lorenzo's pattern of scrupulously avoiding self-aggrandizement. The oration constantly lauds Lorenzo's willful subordination of personal advancement to the good of the state: "nihil publici commodi in privatam utilitatem derivabat" ("he never directed public funds into his private holdings"), and he always "praefererebat privatis commodis communem utilitatem" ("preferred the commonwealth to private interests").⁴⁸ These accolades would seem to counter Decembrio's charges that Florentine leaders enrich themselves at the expense of the state. As one might expect, Poggio spends a good deal more time on Lorenzo's career as a diplomat for the Florentine republic and as a humanist scholar than as a manager of the Roman branch office of the Medici bank.

It is possible that this rhetoric is simply an exercise in convention or that the oration serves Poggio's personal ends. Poggio had maintained a fairly close friendship with Cosimo and Lorenzo since at least 1433 when he supported them during their exile from Florence at the hands of the Albizzi faction. He had strong financial reasons for lending them his support: the 1433 census lists his debt to the Florentine branch of the Medici bank as almost 715 florins, a substantial sum when compared with the 600-florin dowry he received when he married into the Buondelmonti family in 1436 or the 1060-florin sum he reported in 1433 as his gross

History, Law and Historicism in Poggio Bracciolini," in Phyllis Mack and Margaret C. Jacob, eds., *Politics and Culture in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honor of H. G. Koenigsberger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 119–51, 137. One such instance, "Non enim civitates solum, sed ne ulli quidem coetus hominum, aut vitae commercium, sublata iustitia, viguissent" even echoes the wording of the funeral oration. See Poggio Bracciolini, *Oratio in laudem legum*, in Eugenio Garin, ed., *La disputa delle arti nel Quattrocento* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1947), 11–15, 14. But Poggio's project in the *Oratio in laudem legum* is distinct from the funeral oration in that he is more interested in arguing for a theoretical underpinning of laws and for the centrality of laws in constituting the authority of the state than he is in describing the necessary ethics that will ensure the fair application of the laws.

⁴⁷ Bruni wrote the *Oratio funebris* for Nanni Strozzi in 1428. For the text, see Susanne Daub, *Leonardo Brunis Rede auf Nanni Strozzi: Einleitung, Edition und Kommentar* (Stuttgart and Leipzig: Teubner, 1996), 281–302. For a translation of the beginning of the oration, see Gordon Griffiths et al., eds., *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1987), 121–27.

⁴⁸ Poggio, *Oratio . . . in funere*, vol. 1, 282.

capital.⁴⁹ His friendship with the Medici likely enabled him to defer this debt for a significant period of time. Poggio's repeated insistence on the care Lorenzo took to avoid profiting from the state and on his generosity [*liberalitas*] to just about everyone can be read at once as a personal tribute of thanks as well as an entreaty for further political advancement.

It is not necessary to take up the question of sincerity when reading Poggio's funeral oration, because by evaluating its function within the larger body of his writings at this time, a consistent intellectual project emerges. Although it would probably be unwise to claim that Poggio did not at all hope for some sort of personal remuneration for his work on Lorenzo's funeral oration, his position was relatively secure. He maintained his appointment as a secretary in the Curia and had been offered the position of Chancellor of Florence in 1429 but had refused the office. Furthermore, as Lauro Martines's research has shown, Poggio's property was quite extensive in 1440 and would only grow larger. Both the *Oratio in funere* and *De vera nobilitate* explain the relationship of the concept of *iustitia* to the governance of the state. By predicating both justice and nobility on *virtus*, Poggio works toward the formulation of a political theory for the Medicean regime. This apparently meritocratic rhetoric did not, however, prevent Poggio from reminding non-Florentines of his wife's noble ancestry from time to time.⁵⁰

Poggio's legal thinking in these years increasingly deploys *iustitia* as a foundation for wise governance. At about the same time as (or perhaps a few years before) he composed the funeral oration for Lorenzo and *De vera nobilitate*, Poggio wrote a brief tract linking the authority of the state to a strong legal and social commitment to justice. The *Oratio in laudem legum* argues that the state depends on laws for its legitimacy and that the laws, in turn, must find their origin in justice:

Ut nisi iustitiae assisterent leges, infirma ac inutilis quaedam res esset iustitia, nullo ministerio, nullis praesidiis fulta vita certe hominum, tamquam caeca atque errabunda sine legibus passim diffunderet ac collaberetur, omni auxilio destituta.⁵¹

⁴⁹ All of these figures are taken from Lauro Martines, *The Social World of the Florentine Humanists, 1390–1460* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 125.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, two letters from 1436 and 1438, in Poggio, *Lettere*, vol. 2, 208–9; vol. 2, 309.

⁵¹ Poggio, *Oratio in laudem legum*, 14. "If the laws did not defend justice, justice itself would be a weak and useless thing; just so, human life, not strengthened by any employment or by any protections, would surely melt away and collapse, bereft of all aid, as if blind and wandering without laws."

As one might expect, Poggio cites the Roman republic as the example that proves his point, for without laws “sine legibus diutius esse non posset” (“it could not have long endured”).⁵² It is upon these arguments and the concept of a *virtus*-based nobility that the civic panegyric of his funeral oration for Lorenzo is built. Bruni, it should be noted, makes similar arguments for Florence as a meritocracy in his oration on the death of Nanni Strozzi, but Bruni begins with a description of Florence and then extends that sketch to illuminate the life of Strozzi. Poggio, though, uses the individual to explain the city; this strategy becomes especially evident when we consider his other roughly contemporaneous works on political thought. Though Poggio does not use the word “aristocracy” anywhere in these writings of about 1440, the terms that comprise Plato’s definition of aristocracy are central to his concerns. Poggio does not discuss what the rule of the best would mean in institutional terms, but he does go to great pains to describe what Florence’s definition of the best is and to outline the benefits that accrue to the city because of its evenhanded judgment of the civic worth of its leaders.

It is nearly two decades later, in his *In laudem reipublicae Venetorum*, that Poggio offers an answer to the question of what an aristocracy might look like. Perhaps surprisingly, that answer is Venice, even though he never worked for a Venetian patron. A constitution that ensures that the “best” men are in power “nunquam nisi apud Venetos fuisse verissime affirmarim . . .” (“has only ever been found in Venice”).⁵³ His admiration for their government recalls many of his earlier words of praise for Lorenzo and for Florence: “apud quos soli optimates civitatem regunt, obtemperantes legibus intentique omnes ad publici status utilitatem, omni rei privatae cura posthabita” (“with the Venetians, only the best govern the state, under constraint of the laws, and intent, everyone [*sic*] of them, on the advantage of the commonwealth without consideration of personal gain”).⁵⁴ Poggio attributes this fact to the “familiae perantiquae ac nobiles permultae, in quibus rei publicae gubernatio continetur . . .” (“very ancient noble families with whom the governance of the republic lies”).⁵⁵ Indeed, this situation is built into the Venetian constitution, for “nulli plebeo aditus

⁵² Ibid., 12.

⁵³ The original is found in Poggio, *Opera omnia*, vol. 2, 925–37, 925. My citations from *In laudem reipublicae Venetorum* are from the translation *In Praise of the Venetian Republic*, trans. Martin Davies, in Jill Kraye, ed., *Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), vol. 2, 135–45, 136.

⁵⁴ Poggio, *In laudem*, vol. 2, 925; *In Praise*, 136.

⁵⁵ Poggio, *In laudem*, vol. 2, 929; *In Praise*, 138.

aut locus datur ad munia civitatis; solae nobilitati et ex ea viris praestantioribus publica demandantur officia . . ." ("[n]o commoner is granted the opportunity of civic service, public office being reserved for the nobility, and of the nobility only the foremost men").⁵⁶ Poggio thus sets out to describe a real-world, though idealized, example of the sort of government that his theories about nobility might produce. The result is a synthesis of the positions that he had had Niccoli and Lorenzo stake out in *De vera nobilitate*. At Venice, illustrious lineages supply a pool of talent from which the most virtuous will assume the tasks of governance.

In addition to the theoretical thrust of this text, we can identify an end in foreign affairs as well. The diplomatic imperative can be traced to the early years of the 1450s, before the foundation of the Italian League. Florence and the Papacy had been the first Italian states to recognize the legitimacy of strongman Francesco Sforza's rule in Milan beginning in 1450. Venice opposed his accession: the republic worried about Milanese aims for expansion in Lombardy that the former *condottiero* might undertake. Poor relations between Venice and Milan continued; throughout 1451, the Milanese ambassador at Rome, Nicodemo Tranchedini, complained that the Venetians were "diabolical men" and "baptized in evil."⁵⁷ Riccardo Fubini has argued that Pope Nicholas V's support for Francesco Sforza was an effort to check Neapolitan designs on papal territory as well as guarantee that a Milanese-Neapolitan alliance similar to that of Filippo Maria Visconti and Alfonso of Aragon in 1435 would not materialize. During that earlier alliance, the two rulers had set eyes on papal territory.⁵⁸ Cosimo de' Medici's support for Francesco Sforza was designed to thwart the territorial aims of Alfonso, who was attempting to establish bases along the southern Tuscan border.⁵⁹ Predictably, this series of alliances led to a war of 1452–54, in which Florence and Milan were allied against Venice and Naples. The Treaty of Lodi, concluded in April 1454 between Venice, Milan, and (somewhat reluctantly) Florence, put an end to the hostilities and was later strengthened by the Papacy and Naples, leading to the formation of the Italian League in January 1455.

⁵⁶ Poggio, *In laudem*, vol. 2, 929; *In Praise*, 138.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Paolo Margaroli, *Diplomazia e stati rinascimentali: le ambascerie sforzesche fino alla conclusione della Lega italiana (1450–1455)* (Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1992), 78. The citations come from two letters by Tranchedini to Francesco Sforza of 4 December 1451 and 24 June 1451, respectively.

⁵⁸ Riccardo Fubini, "The Italian League," 171–73.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 175.

In that same year, however, internal dissention threatened the Medicean regime, sparking a crisis that was to last until 1458. The grievances of the Florentine upper classes were partly due to the unpopular alliance with Milan as well as to the internal balance of power in the city.⁶⁰ Taxes assessed to pay for Florence's wars over the three decades prior to the Treaty of Lodi were no more popular. By 1458, the Milanese ambassador at Florence could report to Francesco Sforza that Cosimo's influence was waning.⁶¹ Although eventually Cosimo managed to emerge stronger than ever after the establishment of the *Cento* and the *Accoppiatori*, Florence's standing in the eyes of her wary allies was somewhat diminished.⁶² Here it is useful to recall John Najemy's formulation of the uses to which the oligarchic regime of Florence put ideology: he terms "the process by which the elite learned from the *popolo* to speak the language of popular sovereignty . . . as the surest foundation of its own leadership role" a "dialogue between classes."⁶³ In the case of Poggio's panegyric on Venice, we might alter this formulation slightly to take into account external pressures on the Medicean regime. A dialogue between equally-powerful states might help to explain why praise for Venice, Florence's rival in commercial and territorial ambitions, was certainly in order by 1459.

By offering an idealized version of Venetian government and society, Poggio emphasizes the importance of the balance of power among the northern Italian states. Poggio's praise for the Venetian government has ramifications for the strength of the Treaty of Lodi:

Sciunt praeterea se legum custodes esse, non dominos. . . . Id praecipue maxime laude extollendum, quod eorum leges firmae sunt, stabiles longaevaeque, quoad rei publicae utilitas ferat, neque pro voluntate cuiusquam abrogantur neque variantur in diem, sed perpetua sanctione custodiuntur.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ For a detailed account of these years, see Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence under the Medici (1434 to 1494)*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997 [1966]), 99–153.

⁶¹ The quotation reads, "non pò Cosimo continuamente essere in palazzo, e fare como solia" ("Cosimo cannot be constantly about his palace and behave in the manner in which he used to"). Ibid., 103–4. Rubinstein interprets this as an oblique way of saying that "Cosimo's influence with the government was no longer what it used to be."

⁶² Although the assemblies were larger in Florence after 1458, giving the appearance of a more participatory politics, Cosimo tightened his power over his own ruling council.

⁶³ John M. Najemy, "The Dialogue of Power in Florentine Politics," in Anthony Molho et al., eds., *City-States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1991), 269–88, 284.

⁶⁴ Poggio, *In laudem*, vol. 2, 931. "They realize that they are the guardians, and not the masters, of the laws. [...] The special merit of their laws is that they are completely solid and stable, and they remain in force as long as they continue to serve the republic. They

Above all else, Venice is governed by the rule of law. By repeating a version of the myth of Venetian stability, Poggio elevates Florence to a comparable level. While Venice may be the only state in Italy to attain the status of a true aristocracy, Florence is surely not far behind. It seems an inadequate explanation to suggest that Poggio's displeasure over what he considered to be an unfair tax assessment precipitated this encomium to Venice as a means of showing his disgust for Florence.⁶⁵ Venice is, rather, the ideal Florence. Venice has realized in practice what the Florentines strive for in theory. The very act of recognizing Venetian perfection suggests that the Florentines, to a large extent, have incorporated in their own government many of the measures for which Venice receives praise. We have seen how Poggio's long-standing interest in and concern for the rule of law in Florence shaped his political thought. There is no reason to believe that as Chancellor Poggio would espouse a position other than one that promoted Florentine greatness, especially vis-à-vis Venice.

In laudem reipublicae Venetorum carefully avoids mention of Florence. There is only an oblique reference to Poggio's desire that "reliquae ad imitandas tam bene moratae rei publicae institutiones ex illarum memoria et laude incitentur" ("other cities [may] imitate the institutions of this well-ordered republic by a rehearsal of their merits").⁶⁶ But Poggio need not say explicitly that Florence has, to a large extent, imitated many of the governmental institutions of which Venice can boast. Because he works within the well-established tradition of civic panegyric and because Cosimo had just instituted a number of reforms that heightened the outward appearance of republican government in Florence, reference to the city that employs him is necessarily implicit throughout the tract. Poggio produces a very public message: Florence is Venice's equal. But the implications of this assertion extend well beyond a desire to preserve the balance of power that the Treaty of Lodi established. Poggio employs a genre that Bruni had perfected in Florence and that had been used abroad in order to help legitimate Florentine institutions. Poggio's praise for Venice,

are not repealed at the whim of individuals nor amended from day to day, but are kept safe by perpetual sanctions." *In Praise*, 140.

⁶⁵ See Felix Gilbert, *History: Choice and Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1977), 187. Gilbert derives the story of the unfair taxes from Walser, *Poggius Florentinus*, 290–91. Gilbert interprets the sentiments expressed in *In laudem* as indicative of Poggio's personal feelings. This leads him to speculate that Poggio seriously considered living in an apparently more stable Venice as a means of escaping the caprice of Florentine government.

⁶⁶ Poggio, *In laudem*, 2:925; *In Praise*, 136.

particularly his emphasis on the monarchical nature of the government at the expense of some of the more democratic of Venice's institutions, suggests that his version of civic humanism had much less to do with republican ideals. Poggio is not truly interested in theorizing liberty here as much as he is in the role that *virtus* plays in constituting a stable government. By basing his praise of a stable republic on the centrality of *virtus*, Poggio suggests that Florence itself is a version of a Platonic aristocracy. This message would have been valuable within Florence as a way of shoring up support for the Medicean regime, as it would abroad, for the existence of an aristocratic government would imply that Cosimo retain more control of the city than may actually have been the case.⁶⁷

The simple fact that a humanist of Poggio's reputation should choose Bruni's *Laudatio* as a model for imitation at the very end of a distinguished career shows just how far the political cachet of this genre had risen in the half-century since Bruni first wrote the oration. This fact may have been partly due to Poggio's rediscovery of a complete text of Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* in 1416, which provided a theory of panegyric, including civic panegyric.⁶⁸ The *Laudatio* was, in Bruni's own probable estimation, a work best regarded in the category of juvenilia. Bruni may have seen his oration as a rhetorical set-piece whose rules were different from historiography. He argues in a 1440 letter, defending his early work, that the genre of panegyric does not strictly bind its author to any obligation to truth-telling.⁶⁹ Bruni sought to establish a sharp division between panegyric and history, but his successors in the genre were less sure. Because panegyric subordinates a truthful account of the events it describes to the exhortation of the values it espouses, it ought not to be judged as an historical text. Yet the classical precedence for this position is not absolute. Even Cicero and Livy, who both admonish historians to privilege the truth, also describe the value of history as a series of *exempla*.⁷⁰ Hence

⁶⁷ Rubinstein notes that Milanese envoys to Florence at this time "were perhaps not always above exaggerating Cosimo's influence in order to please their master and vindicate his policy." See Nicolai Rubenstein, *The Government of Florence*, 146.

⁶⁸ See Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 3.7, esp. 26–28. See also R. Sabbadini, *Le scoperte dei codici latini e greci ne' secoli XIV e XV*, rev. ed., ed. Eugenio Garin (Florence: Sansoni, 1967 [1905–14]), vol. 2, 247–48.

⁶⁹ See Bruni's letter of 1440 to Francesco Pizolpasso, the Archbishop of Milan, in which he argues that "[h]istory is one thing, panegyric another. History must follow the truth, panegyric extols many things above the truth" (quoted in James Hankins, "Rhetoric, History, and Ideology," 161).

⁷⁰ Cicero spells out the truth-telling obligation of the historian in *De oratore* 2.15.62, but also advised that the historian practice *ornatio*, or embellishment, as in *Brutus* 10.42–11.43.

the popularity of *De viris* accounts during the Renaissance that present ancient and contemporary lives as models for public conduct.

I have read these texts as participants in a developing literature of diplomacy that uses praise for a city as a means to further that city's international interests. Some contemporary readers may have found Decembrio's *Panegyricus* a threatening piece of rhetoric, but I do not believe that this was the intent of Decembrio or of the Milanese government. Even Florentine intellectuals probably would not have read it in that fashion. Decembrio stresses diplomacy above all—though perhaps an imperfect diplomacy for the Florentines—and leaves avenues for dialogue open. For a text that ostensibly seeks to fashion Milan as the greatest city in the world, it is strangely at pains to justify its actions and to show how those actions aid the interests of Italy as a whole. Poggio's oration is similarly concerned with the strength of Venice's institutions of government because the city can serve as a model for peaceful and stable interaction among the Italian states. These texts participate in a dialogue within and beyond a city's borders in which semi-fictionalized accounts of a place serve to explain and justify the emerging artificial person of the state. Before permanent ambassadors, these writings act as emissaries, clarifying the ends of a state and suggesting why those ends ought to be in the interests of its neighbors. They embody at once the "legal fiction" (*fictio iuris*) upon which early modern literature of diplomacy will depend, as Timothy Hampton has recently shown, and imply that an early republic of letters was emerging among Italian humanists who were linked by a common concern with the application of classical learning to international negotiation.⁷¹ Civic panegyric could serve to ratify the city's policies to its own populace, but in its scope and its circulation beyond the city walls, it reached much farther.

For a more detailed discussion of the role of *ornatio* in Cicero's work, see Peter G. Bietenholz, *Historia and Fabula: Myths and Legends in Historical Thought from Antiquity to the Modern Age* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 57–61. Livy argues in his preface to *Ab urbe condita* that history must instruct the reader "what to imitate . . . [and] mark for avoidance what is shameful in the conception and shameful in the result." This citation is from the Loeb edition of B. O. Foster et al., trans., *Livy, with an English Translation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919–59), 1.prae.10. For an early Renaissance example, see Petrarch's prefaces to his *De viris illustribus*, in which he cites Cicero and Livy on these points. The prefaces can be found in Benjamin G. Kohl, "Petrarch's Prefaces to *De viris illustribus*," *History and Theory* 13 (1974): 132–44.

⁷¹ See Timothy Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy: Literature and Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

If the term “civic humanism” retains any usefulness for us today it is surely not in describing the composition of the *Laudatio* and the moment just after 1402 in which humanists supposedly realized the political power of their studies, but rather in conceptualizing the longer span of several decades during which time humanist learning gained influence and prestige. If we speak of civic humanism, we must realize that this concept is not exclusively or even primarily about republicanism.⁷² The diplomatic function of civic panegyric is one such method for gauging the import both in Florence and elsewhere of the generic conventions that readers of the *Laudatio* found useful. These texts do not share a commitment to republican ideals of civic virtue, but rather a pragmatic outlook that sees diplomacy as increasingly important for a city's survival. The genre of civic panegyric was widely imitated at this time in Italy because of its flexibility in putting praise for an individual city at the service of an emerging statecraft in which the concept of a balance of power among Italian states was central. These panegyrics are less *ad hoc* rhetorical interventions in response to specific crises than arguments for placing the city-state within a northern Italian political and economic context. As such, they are also testaments to the growing importance of the state as a political institution that organizes power within and beyond a given geographical region. As a genre that exemplifies relatively early diplomatic overtures between states, civic panegyric can help to broaden the concept of civic humanism to include intellectuals working under so-called tyrannies as well as humanists whose goals may be far wider than the instruction of their audience in the codes of republican virtue.

⁷² Hankins proposes the term “signorial humanism” as a reminder of the limitations and the possibilities of Baron's adjective “civic.” He first uses this phrase in *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, vol. 1, 106, and discusses the implications of this concept more fully in “*De republica*: Civic Humanism in Renaissance Milan.”

THE GIFT OF LIBERTY AND THE AMBITIOUS TYRANT:
LEONARDO DA VINCI AS A POLITICAL THINKER,
BETWEEN REPUBLICANISM AND ABSOLUTISM

Marco Versiero

In 1869 the renowned French novelist Arsène Houssaye included in his biography of Leonardo a chapter on “la politique de Léonard de Vinci,” the contents of which reflect a particular current of nineteenth-century criticism. In fact, Houssaye’s characterization of Leonardo’s art as “au-dessus—d’autres diront au-dessous—de toutes les politiques” (“above—others might say beneath—all things political”)¹ to account for his apparent political detachment may be seen as the culmination of a “Leonardo *moralisé*” tradition—a reaction to the Risorgimento’s aversion toward the artist and his intellectual freedom, heroically re-interpreted as a sign of distinction.² At the outset of the twentieth century, this reactionary spirit was taken up by Benedetto Croce, who bore little patience for the patriotic and neopositivist climate of post-unification Italy, in which the political value of Leonardo’s genius was determined by its contribution to the recent and feeble rebirth of a national identity.³ In his *Leonardo filosofo* (1906), Croce made no concessions to Leonardo’s political indifference: “Leonardo fu del tutto indifferente alle sorti della patria e alle vicende degli Stati; animale apolitico, sebbene uomo, e quale uomo!” (“Leonardo was entirely indifferent to the fate of his homeland and to state affairs; an apolitical animal, and yet a man, and what a man!”)⁴ Roused by the neo-Latin celebration of the artist’s greatness and the political propaganda it inspired, Croce’s intolerance was reversed in the early 1930s by Antonio Gramsci, in whose

¹ Arsène Houssaye, *Histoire de Léonard de Vinci* (Paris: Didier, 1869), 156–160. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are the editors’.

² See Roberto Paolo Ciardi, “Leonardo illustrato: genio e morigeratezza,” in *L’immagine di Leonardo. Testimonianze figurative dal XVI al XIX secolo*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Roberto Paolo Ciardi and Carlo Sisi (Florence: Giunti, 1997), 31.

³ Similar opinions were expressed, for instance, in Arturo Farinelli, *Leonardo e la natura* (Milan: Bocca, 1939 [1903]), 109 and Joseph Péladan, *La dernière leçon de Léonard de Vinci à son Académie à Milan (1499), précédée d’une étude sur le Maître* (Paris: Sanson, 1904), 18–19, 41.

⁴ Benedetto Croce, “Leonardo filosofo,” in *Leonardo da Vinci, conferenze fiorentine* (Milan: Treves, 1910), 237.

opinion Leonardo's behaviour might be seen as evidence of the cosmopolitanism of Italian Renaissance intellectuals,⁵ a cause of the reactionary nature of this cultural era, if evaluated from a strictly political viewpoint, that is, on the basis of the constitutional process of the modern State as a political order.⁶

Since the mid 1850s, Leonardo's lack of interest in political affairs had been justified by his status as a so-called "citizen-of-the-world," a *cliché* which finds its earliest expression in Edgar Quinet's *Les Révolutions d'Italie*, in which the artist appears as the quintessence of modernity and, therefore, a man without a country.⁷ The endurance of this icon, "the solitary spectator, accustomed to hover far above the level of the questions of the day,"⁸ has long hindered scholarly inquiry into the political dimension of Leonardo's literary and conceptual legacy. Even during the period of critical revisionism, prompted by the quincennial of his birth in 1952, Karl Jaspers styled him a "prince among princes," contrasting Leonardo's political detachment to the spirited patriotism of Michelangelo Buonarroti, thereby elevating the artists' legendary rivalry from a trademark of artistic historiography since Vasari to an impetus for philosophical inquiry.⁹ Nevertheless, in those same years, Cesare Luporini's efforts to situate Leonardo and his apparent contradictions within the artist's own cultural environment¹⁰ set the stage for a subtler analysis of the political implications of Leonardo's work—in particular, in his activity as an urban planner, military architect, and engineer.¹¹ These are, of course, the most

⁵ Letter to Tatiana Schucht, September 7, 1931. See my forthcoming "... *Una cosa da nulla, come vedi: il Leonardo di Gramsci*," in *Marx e Gramsci: filologia, filosofia e politica allo specchio*, Conference Proceedings, ed. Francesca Izzo (Naples: University for Eastern Studies—Departement of Philosophy and Politics, December 4–5, 2008).

⁶ Cf. Francesco Orestano, *Leonardo da Vinci* (Rome: Optima, 1919), 197–198, who assimilated his cosmopolitanism to an apolitical attitude, characterizing Leonardo's individualism and isolation as "stoico [...] filantropismo universale, recisamente cosmopolita e apolitico" ("stoic [...] universal philanthropism, decidedly cosmopolitan and apolitical").

⁷ See A. Richard Turner, *Inventing Leonardo* (Berkeley; Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 105.

⁸ Eugène Müntz, *Leonardo da Vinci. Artist, Thinker and Man of Science* (New York, NY: Parkstone Press, 2006 [1899]), vol. 2, 116. See also Gabriel Séailles, *Léonard de Vinci, l'artiste et le savant, 1452–1519. Essai de biographie psychologique* (Paris: Didier, 1906 [1892]), 499–501.

⁹ Karl Jaspers, *Leonardo filosofo* (Milan: Abscondita, 2001 [1953]), 83, 108–113. See the same comparison in Leonid M. Batkin, *Leonardo da Vinci* (Rome: Laterza, 1988), 201–202.

¹⁰ Cesare Luporini, *La mente di Leonardo* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1997 [1953]), 137. See also Gerolamo Calvi, *Vita di Leonardo* (Bergamo: Morcelliana, 1949 [1936]), 118–119.

¹¹ See Corrado Maltese, "Il pensiero architettonico e urbanistico di Leonardo," in *Leonardo, saggi e ricerche*, ed. Achille Marazza (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1954),

natural grounds for an assessment of Leonardo's political thought insofar as they anchor him to the mechanics of social organization. My aim, however, is to shift the focus of attention from the contingency of Leonardo as a *man*, with any concrete political convictions particular to *his* time, to the immanency of his approach as a *thinker*, with a political vision pertinent to *every* time.¹² In other words, I wish to highlight the recurrence in his writings—which, from now on, I will call his “political fragments”—of a precise political vocabulary, one which may prove particularly significant in the context of the vernacular regeneration of political discourse that distinguished the Italian Renaissance.

Leonardo's first extended stay in Milan appears to have inspired most of his political fragments. As a guest at the court of the Sforza family during the last two decades of the fifteenth century, in the service of Ludovico il Moro, Leonardo exhibited the breadth of his talents as an artist and technician, often with a view to their potential for public use. His desire for recognition above all as a master of the arts of warfare, which he proudly declared in his famous letter of self-presentation to Ludovico (1482), re-emerges several years later in a sketch for the proem of his projected military treatise, which he never completed (1487–90): “per mantenere il dono principal di natura, cioè libertà, trovo modo da offendere e difendere, in stando assediati dalli ambiziosi tiranni; e prima dirò del sito murale e perché i popoli possino mantenere i loro boni e giusti signori” (“In order to maintain the principal gift of nature, that is, liberty, I will find the way to offend and to defend when being besieged by ambitious tyrants. And first I will speak about the positioning of the walls, and further, how the people can maintain their good and just lords”).¹³ It is surprising that some have

331–358; Luigi Firpo, *Leonardo architetto e urbanista* (Turin: Utet, 1963), 63–80; Eugenio Garin, “La città in Leonardo. Lettura Vinciana XI, 15 aprile 1971” in *Leonardo da Vinci letto e commentato*, ed. Paolo Galluzzi (Florence: Giunti-Barbèra, 1974), 309–325; Pietro C. Marani, *L'architettura fortificata negli studi di Leonardo da Vinci, con il catalogo completo dei disegni* (Florence: Olschki, 1984), 19–21; Luigi Firpo, “Leonardo as Urban Planner,” in *Leonardo da Vinci Engineer and Architect*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Paolo Galluzzi and Jean Guillaume, foreword by Carlo Pedretti (Montreal: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1987), 287–301; Carlo Pedretti, *Leonardo architetto* (Milan: Electa, 1988 [1978]), 57–63; Pietro C. Marani, “Leonardo urbanista e l'antico: riflessioni ed ipotesi,” *Raccolta Vinciana* 26 (1995): 3–41.

¹² Some useful indications may be found in Edmondo Solmi, *Scritti vinciani. Le Fonti dei Manoscritti di Leonardo da Vinci e altri studi* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1976), 574. See also, for a more general perspective, Giorgio Baratta's recent, *Leonardo tra noi. Immagini suoni parole nell'epoca intermediale* (Rome: Carocci, 2007), 20, 66, 77.

¹³ Paris, Institut de France, *Ms Ashburnham I*, f. 10 recto (formerly *Ms B*, f. 100 recto). The English translation is from *The Manuscripts of Leonardo da Vinci in the Institut de France*.

attempted to deny or at least minimize the political value of this passage:¹⁴ not only does it make plain the centrality of natural liberty to Leonardo's political thought;¹⁵ it also reveals his indebtedness to the Tuscan tradition of civic humanism and republicanism. Thanks to his education as a young Florentine member of the Medicean cultural *milieu* and to the knowledge he eventually acquired of some of the masterpieces of Florentine republicanism, such as Matteo Palmieri's *Vita civile* and Leon Battista Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*, Leonardo was well-versed in contemporary doctrines of liberty.¹⁶ Intertwined with the republican dispute was of course the juxtaposition between the "good and just lords" and the "ambitious tyrants" who menace the integrity of the State, a juxtaposition which replaced the traditional (Aristotelian and medieval) opposition between good and bad forms of government with the primacy of the republic over the principality. By applying such linguistic and logical formulas to the non-republican reality of the Lombard Dukedom, Leonardo identifies the political legitimacy of a monarchy both in the preservation of liberty that it enacts and in the consensual legal device by means of which a ruler's subjects are called upon to "maintain" him—not only by defending him militarily from external enemies, but also by granting internal consent as a political approbation of his conduct and rule.

Another fragment of some years later helps to explain Leonardo's understanding of liberty as the foundation of political order. As the Sforza regime collapsed under the French invasion of Lombardy led by Louis XII (1499), Leonardo perceived a subtle allegory of his day and age in the fable of the owl and the thrushes, in which a biting zoomorphic metaphor is employed to illustrate the fate of the precarious political communities of late fifteenth-century Italy. The silly cheerfulness of a flock of thrushes over a hunter's capture of an owl is compared with the attitude of "quelle terre, che si rallegran di vedere perdere la libertà ai lor maggiori, mediante i quali perdano il soccorso e rimangono legati in potenza del lor nemico,

Manuscript B, ed. John Venerella, foreword by Pietro C. Marani (Milan: Ente Raccolta Vinciana, 2003), 162.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Giovanni Ponte, *Leonardo prosatore* (Genoa: Tilgher, 1976), 109, n. 27.

¹⁵ See Fausto M. Bongioanni, *Leonardo pensatore. Saggio sulla posizione filosofica di Leonardo da Vinci* (Piacenza: Porta, 1935), 120, n. 4.

¹⁶ See my "Il dono principal di natura: la libertà politica negli scritti di Leonardo da Vinci, dal repubblicanesimo del bene comune alla prospettiva governamentale anti-democratica," in *Libertà e democrazia nella storia del pensiero politico*, Conference Proceedings, ed. Nicola Antonetti and Matteo Truffelli (Soveria Mannelli, CZ: Rubbettino, 2008), 157–163.

lasciando la libertà e spesse volte la vita" ("those lands which delight in seeing their freedom lost to their overlords, through whom they lose support and fall under the power of their enemy, forfeiting liberty and often life").¹⁷ Thus, Leonardo was aware of two closely related aspects of the key-concept of liberty: the freedom of the *maggiori*—that is, their individual condition of non-submission to the restrictions imposed by others—and, thanks to them, the freedom of the *terre*—that is, the political provision of autonomy and reciprocal separation among socio-political communities. It is possible to recognize here a negative formulation of liberty as the absence of required action, rather than the power to do what one wants, a discrepancy that would undergo fuller treatment within the context of Machiavellian republicanism. The notion that war is the main cause of the loss of liberty recurs as the solution to the quite contemporary riddle, *De' metalli*, in which Leonardo carries out a pacifist speech against metals for their deplorable use when converted into weapons: like a monster who "emerges from obscure and gloomy caverns" ("uscirà delle oscure e tenebrose spelonche") in order to bring about "great anxieties, dangers, and death" ("grandi affanni, pericoli e morte") or like a merciless tyrant, who "will commit innumerable betrayals" ("commetterà infiniti tradimenti") and "lead many villains into murder, theft, and slavery" ("persuaderà li omini tristi alli assassinamenti e latrocini e le servitù"), war is depicted as capable of "depriving the free cities of their state" ("torrà lo stato alle città libere").¹⁸ The word "stato" here seems to refer to that political institution which is to be perceived as contrary to the proper condition of civic liberty. Not by chance, the conceptual juxtaposition of the words "stato" and "libertà," associated with a third topic of Leonardo's political vocabulary—that is, "roba"—, resurfaces in another fragment, also referring to the fall of the Sforza government: a 1500 memorandum, rapidly

¹⁷ Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, *Codex Atlanticus*, f. 323 *recto* (formerly 117 r-b). See *Il Codice Atlantico della Biblioteca Ambrosiana di Milano*, ed. A. Marinoni, foreword by C. Pedretti (Florence: Giunti, 2000 [1973]), vol. 1, 552. Some political considerations regarding this fragment are sketched by Giuseppina Fumagalli, *Leonardo, omo sanza lettere* (Florence: Sansoni, 1939), 211, note 2 and Carlo Vecce, *Leonardo da Vinci. Scritti* (Milan: Mursia, 1992), 71, n. 35. For fuller treatment, see my "Questo torrà lo stato alle città libere: stato e libertà negli scritti di Leonardo da Vinci," *Il Pensiero Politico* 38 (2005): 271–278; idem, "Per un lessico politico di Leonardo da Vinci. II. Indizi di polemologia: 'naturalità' del conflitto e 'necessarietà' della guerra," *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 15 (2009): 121–134.

¹⁸ *Codex Atlanticus*, f. 1033 *recto* (formerly 370 r-a), ca. 1494–97. See *Il Codice Atlantico* (as in note 17), vol. 3, 1864. For discussion of this text, see my "Il duca [ha] perso lo stato...: Niccolò Machiavelli, Leonardo da Vinci e l'idea di Stato," *Filosofia Politica* 21 (2007): 85–105.

sketched on the cover of a travel-notebook, enumerates the names and facts of the Milanese defeat, ending with the epigram: “Il duca perse lo stato e la roba e libertà e nessuna sua opera si finì per lui” (“The Duke lost the state, his possessions, and his liberty; and not one of his works was finished for him”).¹⁹ Such a statement offers a clear indication of the three factors Leonardo perceived as the logical and practical prerequisites for any state’s political stability and, therefore, the ingenious productivity of its citizens.

To better understand the political meaning of “roba” as a synonym of “wealth”—not only in the sense of private possessions but of political leverage, a means of improving or reinforcing power relations and insuring military conquest—we shall now consider a later text, written around 1504, in which Leonardo draws on the anecdotal tradition of Aristotle’s relationship with his famous pupil Alexander the Great, which he likely learned of through Palmieri’s *Vita civile*. Interestingly, his interpretation of this acquaintance as a reciprocal apprenticeship (“Aristotile e Alessandro furon preceptori l’un dell’altro” [“Aristotle and Alexander were teachers of one another”]) aligns Aristotle’s superiority in philosophical speculation, which enabled him to conquer all realms of human knowledge (“Aristotile ebbe grande scienza, la quale li furon mezzo a usurpari tutto il rimanente delle scienze composte dalla somma dei filosofi” [Aristotle had great knowledge, which was the means whereby he conquered all the remaining fields of inquiry pursued by all philosophers]) with Alexander’s excellence in statecraft, which enabled him to conquer the entire world (“Alessandro fu ricco di stato, il qual li fu mezzo a usurpare il mondo” [“Alexander was rich in power, which was the means whereby he conquered the world”]).²⁰ The “stato” in this case is conceptualized as a political tool, representing the full range of Alexander’s political virtues and qualities, such as personal charisma, economic strength, together with the support of trustworthy councillors and military might. The same association of politics with economics appears cursorily in chapter 65

¹⁹ Paris, Institut de France, *Ms L*, front cover verso. See *The Manuscripts of Leonardo da Vinci in The Institut de France. Manuscript L*, ed. John Venerella, foreword by Pietro C. Marani (Milan: Ente Raccolta Vinciana, 2001), 4. Gerolamo Calvi, *Vita di Leonardo*, 141. Edmondo Solmi, *Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519)* (Florence: Barbèra, 1900), 121, suggested that the chronology of this memorandum should date back to the second and definitive fall of Ludovico il Moro (February 1500), whose news came to Leonardo during his stay in Venice (March of the same year). Cf. Martin Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci. Le mirabili operazioni della natura e dell’uomo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1982 [1981]), 196.

²⁰ Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, *Ms 8936*, f. 24 recto; see *Leonardo da Vinci. I Codici di Madrid*, ed. L. Reti (Florence: Giunti Barbèra, 1974), vol. 5, 33.

of the so-called *Book on Painting*, posthumously compiled by Francesco Melzi, Leonardo's pupil and heir, and based on a number of literary autographs that are now lost. Here, Leonardo deems that "molto maggior gloria è quella della virtù dei mortali, che quella dei loro tesori" ("much greater is the glory of the virtue of mortals than is the glory of their treasures"), which leads to a brief political digression that begins: "Quanti imperatori e quanti principi sono passati che non ne resta alcuna memoria, e solo cercorono li *stati e ricchezze* per lasciare fama di loro?" ("How many emperors and how many princes have passed of whom we have no recollection, and who sought to ensure their fame through power and riches").²¹ Leonardo's rhetorical quandary also introduces the theme of the ephemeral nature of "states" as human artifacts, especially when compared with the millenarian endurance of natural phenomena, a fixture in Leonardo's thought since the end of his first Florentine period (ca. 1481) when he lamented, echoing a passage of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*: "O tempo, veloce predatore delle create cose, quanti re, quanti popoli hai tu disfatti e quante mutazioni di stati e vari casi sono seguiti . . . !" ("O time, swift predator of created things, how many kings, how many peoples have you undone and how many changes and upheavals have followed . . . !").²² It is worth noting that the word "re," referring to "kings," has been corrected over two previous lexical attempts, "monarchi" and "monarchie," revealing an effort on Leonardo's part to pinpoint the best political order for the expression of kingship—namely, monarchy, which leads to the nominal assimilation of all political orders.

At the same time, Leonardo's pessimism concerning the advantages of democracy emerges in one of his most enigmatic prophecies, dating back to his return to Florence at the beginning of the sixteenth century: "Del comune. Un meschino sarà soiato e essi soiatori sempre fien sua ingannatori e rubatori e assassini d'esso meschino" ("Regarding the *comune*: A wretch will be flattered and those flatterers will always make tricksters and thieves and assassins of that wretch").²³ The municipal institution

²¹ The lost original of this passage is believed to date back to ca. 1505–10; see *Leonardo da Vinci. Libro di Pittura, Codice Urbinat lat. 1270 nella Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, ed. C. Pedretti and C. Vecce (Florence: Giunti, 1995), vol. 1, 175–177.

²² London, British Library, *Ms Arundel 263*, f. P 1 recto (formerly 156 recto); see *Il Codice Arundel 263 della British Library. Edizione in facsimile nel riordinamento cronologico dei suoi fascicoli*, ed. C. Pedretti and C. Vecce (Florence: Giunti, 1998), 89.

²³ *Codex Atlanticus*, f. 105 a verso (formerly 37 v-c), c. 1504. See *Il Codice Atlantico* (as in note 17), vol. 1, 147. A political interpretation of this fragment has been confirmed by Carlo Vecce, *Leonardo da Vinci. Scritti* (as in n. 17), 132.

of the Italian *comune* is seen in both its mirrored and complementary dimensions: as the social basis of a political institution (that is, as a synonym of *popolo*), it is embedded in the words “meschino soiato”; as a directive organization, comprised of the whole of the community’s representatives, it is characterized by “soiatori [...] ingannatori e rubatori e assassini d’esso meschino.”²⁴ It is thus possible to notice, on the one hand, Leonardo’s allegiance to the traditional understanding of the *bene comune* as the heart of a republican constitution, to be defended from the threats of egoistic individualism in accordance with the principles of civic humanism; and, on the other hand, his distrust of any form of indirect democracy, which relies upon the mediated representation of interests and rights. Explicitly denounced by Leonardo through a late reference to St. Mark’s Gospel, the vulnerability of any political apparatus that stresses the recurrence of internal division as a cause of their downfall (“ogni regno in sé diviso è disfatto” [“every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation”]),²⁵ re-emerges in an allegorical aphorism that compares life and human states to a rank of tiles, or dominoes, falling in chain reaction, thus underlining the rivalry among “states” as a further cause of their collapse.²⁶

“Roba,” understood as a combination of wealth and fortune, may also serve as a means to preserve and reinforce the hierarchical bonds within a political setting. Leonardo makes this evident in the most important of his political fragments, written during the central phase of his first stay in Milan—that is, the draft of a memorandum to Ludovico il Moro, containing an ambitious proposal of urban renewal in the wake of a dangerous pestilence (1484), together with an innovative revision of the social and economic landscape of the city of Milan. This text dates to about 1493–97 and has been interpreted by such eminent scholars as Eugenio Garin and Luigi Firpo as a premonition of Machiavelli’s *realpolitik*.²⁷ According to Leonardo:

²⁴ *Codex Atlanticus*, f. 184 verso (formerly 65 v-b); see *Il Codice Atlantico*, vol. 1, 235.

²⁵ *Ms Arundel 263*, f. P 139 recto (formerly 180 verso). See *Il Codice Arundel 263*, 425–426. Regarding the late chronology of this fragment (ca. 1505–10), suggested by its second half (“così ogni ingegno diviso in diversi studi si confonde e indebolisce” [“thus every intellect divided among various studies is confused and weakened”]). See Pietro C. Marani, *Leonardo, una carriera di pittore* (Milan: Motta, 1999), 320.

²⁶ Paris, Institut de France, *Ms G*, f. 89 recto, c. 1511–15. See *The Manuscripts of Leonardo da Vinci in the Institut de France. Manuscript G*, ed. John Venerella, foreword by Pietro C. Marani (Milan: Ente Raccolta Vinciana, 2002), 157.

²⁷ See Eugenio Garin, *La città in Leonardo*, 320–322 and Luigi Firpo, *Leonardo architetto e urbanista*, 66–67. See also Edmondo Solmi, *Leonardo*, 49–50; Giuseppina Fumagalli,

Tutti i popoli obbediscano e son mossi da' lor magnati, e essi magnati si collegano e costringano co' signori per due vie: o per sanguinità o per roba sanguinata. Sanguinità quando i lor figli sono, a similitudine di statichi, sicurtà e pegno della lor dubitata fede; roba, quando tu farai a ciascun d'essi murare una casa o due dentro alla tua città, della quale lui ne tragga qualch'entrata.²⁸

The end result of this process is that “la poveraglia sarà disunita da simili abitatori” (“the poor will be disunited by such inhabitants”). It is interesting that Leonardo insists on the idea that “chi mura ha pur qualche ricchezza” (“those who build have at least some riches”) so that “esso sarà fedele, per non perdere il frutto della sua casa insieme col capitale” (“they will be faithful, in order not to lose the value of their homes together with their capital”). In other words, Leonardo conceives a painless solution to the problem of a possible insubordination of the *magnati* to the *signori*: the latter, instead of resorting to blackmail through the abduction of their subordinates' children, should establish economic ties—in particular, through the concession of building permits. The latter would thus remain loyal to the former in terms comparable to the analysis of costs (i.e. of treason) and benefits (i.e. of loyalty).²⁹ Leonardo's rough prose posits as an alternative to the bonds of *sanguinità*—that is, one's lineage—those of *roba sanguinata* that is, one's patrimony—implying that not only the affective ties of family, but their indispensable material substratum are what cement any nuclear union, which is itself the social and economic basis of any political society.

Leonardo, omo sanza lettere, 310–312; Corrado Maltese, “Il pensiero architettonico e urbanistico di Leonardo,” 340; Carlo Vecce, *Leonardo da Vinci. Scritti*, 251, note 2; and, more recently, Daniel Arasse, *Léonard de Vinci, le rythme du monde* (Paris: Hazan, 1997), 160–163 and Carlo Vecce, *Leonardo*, foreword by C. Pedretti (Rome: Salerno, 1998), 85–86. A deeper analysis from a strictly political viewpoint may be found in my “*O per sanguinità, o per roba sanguinata*: il pensiero politico di Leonardo,” *Raccolta Vinciana* 31 (2005): 215–230. In connection with Machiavelli's writings, see my “Metafore zoomorfe e dissimulazione della duplicità. La politica delle immagini in Niccolò Machiavelli e Leonardo da Vinci,” *Studi Filosofici* 27 (2004): 101–125.

²⁸ *Codex Atlanticus*, f. 184 verso (formerly 65 v-b). See *Il Codice Atlantico*, vol. 1, 235: “All peoples obey and are directed by their magnates, and those magnates relate to and colude with their overlords in two ways: either through bloodlines or through blood-stained goods. Bloodlines when their children are involved, similar to hostages, a guarantee and pledge of their dubious faith; goods, when you make them build a house or two within your city, from which they gain some income.”

²⁹ Regarding these economic implications, see my “*Ogni omo desidera far capitale . . .*: alcune riflessioni di Leonardo da Vinci e la loro correlazione con gli scritti di Machiavelli,” *Prometeo* 93 (2006): 38–45.

By the same token, Leonardo insists on a theoretical and practical union of “beauty” (*bellezza*) and “utility” (*utilità*) in the development of a city’s forms and functions, asserting at the heart of the memorandum: “E la città si fa di bellezza compagna del suo nome e a te utile di dazi e fama eterna del suo accrescimento” (“And the city makes herself a companion of beauty and useful to you of tariffs and eternal fame of its growth”)³⁰ and Leonardo’s observation finds an important precedent in St. Augustine’s *De civitate Dei*—a work that appears in the artist’s 1503 inventory of his own library—where it is affirmed of the human body parts that “one would be at a loss to say whether utility or beauty is the major consideration in their creation.”³¹ Indeed, the passage may well have inspired the question subsequently raised by Leonardo: “Non può essere *bellezza e utilità*, come appare nelle fortezze e nelli omini?” (“Can there not be *beauty* and *utility*, as there are in fortresses and in men?”)³² “Fortress” in this case may refer more generally to a city’s military architecture, which provides not only safety (*utility*), but aesthetic charm (*beauty*), hence its affinity to the human body, which St. Augustine describes as both a useful and a beautiful creation.³³ From a less militaristic and more civic perspective, the “utility” of the urban asset resides for Leonardo in the financial advantages afforded by its social and economic administration—for instance, as noted above, the system of building permits designed to benefit both lords and magnates, without, however, providing for the poor.

Leonardo’s memorandum to Ludovico gains further interest in light of the terms he uses to designate political and social rank—“signori,” “magnati,” “popoli”—terms which reflect a precise lexical and conceptual framework that Leonardo derived from certain vestiges of medieval culture characteristic of Northern Italy, a region further distinguished by a predominance of petty fiefdoms that generally depended on a superior political authority, such as the German Emperor, as in the case of the Sforza Dukedom. Similar terminology may be found in three texts of the

³⁰ *Codice atlantico* 65v-b, 1497.

³¹ Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1972), 22.24.

³² See Carlo Pedretti, “Il concetto di bellezza e utilità in Sant’Agostino e Leonardo,” *Achademia Leonardi Vinci* 5 (1992): 107–111.

³³ On the interpretation of this fragment, see Anna Maria Brizio, *Leonardo da Vinci. Scritti scelti* (Turin: Utet, 1952), 238; Pietro C. Marani, *L’architettura fortificata*, 291 and note 18; Carlo Pedretti, *Leonardo architetto*, 156–159; Edoardo Villata, *Leonardo da Vinci. I documenti e le testimonianze contemporanee*, foreword by P. C. Marani (Milan: Ente Raccolta Vinciana, 1999), 70–71.

preceding decade: a note next to the most attractive of Leonardo's drawings for an "ideal city" (ca. 1487–90)³⁴ and two excerpts from his anatomical writings on the cerebral localization of the *sensus communis* and its relationship to voluntary motion (ca. 1489). Moreover, these texts bear witness to Leonardo's adherence to the naturalistic conception of the state conveyed by the so-called "body politic," a commonplace in the history of political thought.³⁵ Leonardo's drawings in Paris *MS B*, often interpreted as evidence of his utopian approach to urban planning,³⁶ have recently been analyzed in relation to Leon Battista Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*, for which they may have been intended as an iconographic apparatus.³⁷ Leonardo's proposal of a hierarchy of urban planes, one for each social rank,³⁸ has appeared to some as cold and inhuman;³⁹ its immediate objective, in any event, was to put into practice an ideal of functionality inspired by the analogy between the "living" body of the city-state and the physiology of any "organic" body existing in nature, an analogy he would have assimilated since his first Florentine period given its origins in the neo-Platonic correspondence of microcosm and macrocosm.⁴⁰ Naturally, the primacy of the brain over any other member of the body implies a vertical political relationship between a ruler and his subjects.⁴¹ In the two anatomical writings concerning the *sensus communis* as the seat of the soul, the function of the nerves "nel muovere le membra secondo la volontà e il desiderio

³⁴ See Richard Schofield, "Leonardo's Milanese Architecture: Career, Sources and Graphic Techniques," *Achademia Leonardi Vinci* 4 (1991): 137.

³⁵ On what follows, see my "Per un lessico politico di Leonardo da Vinci. I. La metafora organologica della città come corpo politico," *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 13 (2007): 537–556.

³⁶ See, for instance, G. U. Arata, *Leonardo architetto e urbanista* (Milan: Museo Nazionale della Scienza e della Tecnica, 1953), 43 and Alessandro Vezzosi, *Leonardo, Art Utopia and Science*, foreword by Carlo Pedretti (Florence: Giunti Barbèra, 1987), 16–17.

³⁷ See Pietro C. Marani, "Urbanistica rinascimentale da Filarete a Palmanova," in *Rinascimento da Brunelleschi a Michelangelo. La rappresentazione dell'architettura*, exhibition catalogue, ed. H. Millon and V. Magnano Lampugnani (Milan: Bompiani, 1994), 540–545; idem, "Leonardo e Leon Battista Alberti," in *Leon Battista Alberti*, exhibition catalogue, ed. J. Rykwert and A. Engel (Milan: Electa, 1994), 358–365.

³⁸ *Ms B*, f. 16 recto; see *The Manuscripts of Leonardo da Vinci in the Institut de France. Manuscript B*, 30.

³⁹ See Fausto M. Bongioanni, *Leonardo pensatore*, 197–199.

⁴⁰ See the extensive study by André Chastel, *Arte e umanesimo a Firenze al tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico. Studi sul Rinascimento e sull'umanesimo platonico* (Turin: Einaudi, 1964 [1959]), 412–438.

⁴¹ On the development of organic metaphors in political discourse, see, for instance, Adriana Cavarero, *Corpo in figure. Filosofia e politica della corporeità* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1995), 113–137; Gianluca Briguglia, *Il corpo vivente dello Stato. Una metafora politica* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2006).

del comun senso" ("in moving limbs according to the will and wishes of the *sensus communis*") is compared to the services of the *uffiziali* that the lord distributes "per varie provincie e città, i quali in essi loghi rappresentano e obbediscano alla volontà d'esso signore" ("through several provinces and cities, where they represent him and obey his will"). In sum, while Leonardo describes the legal and political paradigm of representation as the foundation of authority, he also highlights its immediacy and the chronological endurance of the mandate: "e quello uffiziale che più in un solo caso abbi obbedito alle commessione fattoli di bocca dal suo signore, farà poi per sé nel medesimo caso cosa che non si partirà dalla volontà d'esso signore" ("that official, who has obeyed his lord's orders more than one time, will carry out, in that very case, some things that will not leave from his lord's will").⁴² The complementary text is equally explicit in its comparison of the body-politic of the city-fortress to every living human organism:⁴³ just as the nerves and muscles of a human being serve the tendons, which in turn serve the *sensus communis*, which in turn serves the soul, so the soldiers of a city-state serve their *condottieri*, who in turn serve their army's captain, who in turn serves his lord—that is, the political ruler.⁴⁴ Leonardo goes on to identify the intellectual *facultas impressiva*, the function of which is to detect external sensorial stimuli, which are later elaborated by the *sensus communis*, with the *referendaria dell'anima*, a medieval term that referred to the inspectors instructed by the Roman Emperor to respond to the grievances of his subjects, underscoring the organic basis of Leonardo's political thought.

⁴² *Codex Atlanticus*, f. 327 verso (formerly 119 v-a); see *Il Codice Atlantico*, vol. 1, 564. Some important considerations concerning this text may be found in Claudio Scarpati, *Leonardo scrittore* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2001), 217–218 and 262, n. 23.

⁴³ See Pietro C. Marani, *L'architettura fortificata*, 34.

⁴⁴ Windsor Castle, Royal Library, *Corpus of Anatomical Sheets*, f. 19019 recto; see Anna Maria Brizio, *Scritti scelti*, 156.

IL MESTIERE DELLE ARMI:
RENAISSANCE TECHNOLOGY AND THE CINEMA

Daniel Leisawitz

Les impressions tant élégantes
et correctes en usance, qui ont
été inventées de mon âge par
inspiration divine, comme, à
contrefil, l'artillerie par
suggestion diabolique.

François Rabelais

Lettre de Gargantua à son fils Pantagruel
*Gargantua (1531)*¹

And, better to effect a speedy end,
Let there be found two fatall Instruments,
The one to publish, th'other to defend
Impious Contention, and proud Discontents:
Make, that instamped Characters may send
Abroad, to thousands, thousand men's intent;
And in a moment may dispatch much more,
Then could a world of Pennes performe before.

Samuel Daniel

Civile Wars, Book 6 (1601)

Introduction

Ermanno Olmi's 2001 film, *Il mestiere delle armi* (*The Profession of Arms*), recounts the last week in the life of Giovanni de' Medici (1498–1526), known to his contemporaries and to history as Giovanni dalle Bande Nere. The first two-thirds of the film follow Giovanni as he and his Papal troops pursue the Imperial army of Charles V, led by General Georg von Frundsberg, through the Po River Valley, until the two armies finally confront

¹ "And in my time we have learned how to produce wonderfully elegant and accurate printed books, just as, on the other hand, we have also learned (by diabolical suggestion) how to make cannon and other such fearful weapons." The English translation is taken from François Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. Burton Raffel (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1990), 157–158.

each other at the battle of Governolo, near Mantua. Frundsberg soundly routs Giovanni and his troops at their first assault, when the German general lets loose several small cannons, which he had secretly procured and hidden from view. Surprised by the artillery fire, Giovanni orders retreat, but not before he is struck in the leg by a cannonball, and is taken to Mantua to recover. The last third of the film relates Giovanni's suffering and death as he slowly succumbs to septicemia as a result of his wound. The movie ends with Giovanni's funeral and the dismantling of his military camp.

The linear nature of the main plotline is complicated by various flashforwards, flashbacks, and imaginings filtered through Giovanni's consciousness. The viewer is also privy to events that unfold concurrently to Giovanni's expedition and infirmity, of which he has no knowledge: these happenings involve various princes of Northern Italy whose allegiances (both public and secretive) dictate their duplicitous, self-serving actions. The politics and selfish interests of the princes win out over the cause of protecting Italy from the invading armies, and ultimately lead to Giovanni's—and consequently Italy's—defeat.

The mainly straightforward, yet intricate, structure of the film creates a nuanced and complex view of history, which is neither completely linear nor completely cyclical. The very first scenes of the film—after the presentation of an ancient epigraph—consist of a series of flashforwards, creating a kind of fatalistic version of history: events will unfold as we have foreseen them. By the end of the series of opening flashforwards, we know how, when, and where Giovanni will die; we are simply ignorant of the details surrounding his death. The final scene in the series of introductory flashforwards is a single, stationary, long, high-angle shot of the interior of the Basilica di Sant'Andrea in Mantua, directed down the nave toward the entrance.² At first the church doors are closed and the scene is bathed in shadow. Then, the doors open, ushering in a beam of white light as two lines of soldiers file into the church. At this point, the title, *Il mestiere delle armi*, appears on the screen in white letters. It fades away as a voice echoes tenuously but steadily through the cavernous

² The choice of the Basilica di Sant'Andrea has important implications as the setting of this scene. This church is a masterpiece of Italian Renaissance architecture, designed by Leon Battista Alberti for Ludovico III Gonzaga, though it took hundreds of years to finish. While Alberti's famous façade of the church is not visible, its classical proportions are echoed in the interior side of the front wall, which is directly in front of the camera. It should also not be overlooked that November 30, the day of Giovanni's death, is also the traditional feast day of Saint Andrew, an apostle and early Christian martyr.

space: “Illustrissimo signor Joanni de Medicii, capitani dell’esercito di Sua Santità Papa Clemente VII, fuit infirmo per die quattro et mortus est, in contrada Grifone, ex febbre per essere ferii in una gamba da un colpo de artiglieria. In Mantua, ultimo de novembre, millecinquecento e ventisei” (“The most illustrious Sir Giovanni de’ Medici, captain of the Army of His Holiness Pope Clement VII, was infirm for four days and died of fever, in the district of Grifone, as a result of being wounded in the leg by an artillery shot. In Mantua, the last day of November 1526”).³ As this announcement ends, writing appears near the bottom of the screen: “Mantova, 30 novembre 1526.” We now understand what it is we are looking at: the funeral of Giovanni dalle Bande Nere. Arrayed in front of the camera, filling the length of the nave, are four lines of soldiers in black armor, holding long-swords and halberds.

In the middle of the nave is the body of Giovanni dalle Bande Nere, laid out on a bier and dressed in his suit of armor.⁴ The camera is positioned roughly halfway between the floor and the high ceiling, hovering above the altar. This makes the perspective of the spectator that of the space usually occupied by the crucifix or altarpiece: it is thus the perspective of the point where history meets eternity, represented by a work of art. Olmi could not have chosen a more significant or ambitious point from which to set his film: we are gazing at the scene through the eyes of the God, who, although infinite and eternal, assumed a finite form and entered into human history. The stream of white light pouring through the aperture of the doorway at the end of the nave creates a cinematic effect, casting

³ All translations in this paper are mine unless otherwise noted. This passage appears in the *Necrologio* of Mantua, as reported in Gio. Pietro Vieusseux, ed., *Archivio Storico Italiano, ossia raccolta di opere e documenti finora inediti o divenuti rarissimi riguardanti la Storia d'Italia* (Appendix) (Florence: 1845), vol. 2, 295, n. 1. Olmi modified it slightly, retaining the archaic Latinisms—which evoke a “Humanist/Renaissance” nuance to the language. However, he changes the original “[per essere ferii in una gamba da] uno archobosio” into “un colpo di artiglieria.” In making this slight change, the director universalizes the implication of this singular historical event: Giovanni’s death was not merely caused by an outmoded artifact of military history (the *archobosio* or harquebus), but by that genre of weapon (artillery or firearms, in general) which is still responsible for millions of deaths up to this day.

⁴ By beginning the film with Giovanni’s funeral, complete with his cadaver laid out on a bier, we may be tempted to side with Jean Baudrillard in his estimations of the role of cinema in the killing of history, and its subsequent capacity to only reproduce historical ghosts and simulacra. I will make the argument however, that Olmi succeeds at filling with meaning the historical death which opens the film. For Baudrillard’s take on history in film, see Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), esp. chap. 2, “A Retro Scenario.”

the shadows of the soldiers onto the floor of the church. The entire scene, consisting of a single, stationary shot that lasts no more than fifty seconds, constitutes a true *mise-en-abîme*, encompassing the whole of the film. Our perspective is one that takes in the entirety of history, back to antiquity and up to the present day, and simultaneously one that is focused on one week in November of 1526 in a cold and foggy Italian marquisate. We are to witness, through a work of art, the death of a man, but also the death of an idea of the world, symbolized by the soldiers fitted out with medieval weapons and armor which were already obsolete, as evidenced by the very presence of the armor-clad cadaver.

And yet, the one-track, fatalistic version of history suggested by the introductory flashforwards is complicated by the various *flashbacks* that are interspersed throughout the film. These analeptic moments bring us within the subjective mind of Giovanni: they are moments he recalls, or imagines, or both (at times it is difficult to tell which) as he lies on his sickbed contemplating his fate and suffering from his wounds. They represent bits of his own subjective history within the history of the film,⁵ and as the film progresses and Giovanni's health deteriorates, he (and we with him) seems to start to confuse his own memories with reality. As his death approaches, time seems to be compacting for him so that past and present begin to merge.

In contrast to this complicated, subjective experience of time, the rigorous historicity of the film, complete with dates and place-names, suggests a meticulous adherence to the historical record which indeed is the case for the most part (the major exceptions being some, though not all, of the subjective flashbacks). So the structure of history in this film is both objective and subjective, linear and circuitous. While Olmi concentrates on one section of linear time, one anecdotal part of history, he focuses his camera on the complex ways in which humans conceive of time as they pass through it. And, from a bird's eye view of history, Olmi stretches a straight line forward and backward in history between the events he

⁵ This idea is inspired by Maureen Turim's book *Flashbacks in Film*: "If flashbacks give us images of memory, the personal archives of the past, they also give us images of history, the shared and recorded past. In fact, flashbacks in film often merge the two levels of remembering the past, giving large-scale social and political history the subjective mode of a single, fictional individual's remembered experience. This process can be called the 'subjective memory,' which here has the double sense of the rendering of history as a subjective experience of a character in the fiction, and the formation of the Subject in history as the viewer of the film identifying with fictional character's position in a fictive social reality." Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film* (New York & London: Routledge, 1989), 2.

depicts on the screen, the ancient past, and the present day, revealing the constant struggle of humankind within the flow and change of time: permanence in flux.

The Epigraph: Tibullus

The first words we encounter in the film appear written on the screen as they are recited by an unseen reader. They are adapted from Tibullus's *Aliorumque carminum* ("Elegies"), and ask who it was that "first invented the frightening arms [...]".⁶ This quotation makes explicit from the outset one of the main themes of the movie: the inexorable development of increasingly deadly weapons that began with the introduction of gunpowder into European warfare. By opening the film with Tibullus, Olmi attunes the audience to literary sources. In this sense, Tibullus's words function as a literary epigraph, which calls attention to the textuality of the film. The opening of this movie, then, is rendered parallel to the physical opening of a book, a book of letters, as we are about to discover. Even the layout of the text on the screen prepares our senses for a textual experience: the vaguely antique font design and the diminutive size of the typeface cause the viewer to squint and struggle a bit in order to decipher the text, as if reading an incunabulum by candlelight; the white letters float in space surrounded by darkness: a distant cry from the past which seems faint from long silence.

Another effect of opening the film with Tibullus is the creation of a historical and cultural frame in which to contextualize the film, which stretches back to Western antiquity.⁷ Olmi connects Renaissance Italy to

⁶ The quote, as it appears written on the screen, is as follows: "Chi fu il primo che inventò le spaventose armi? / Da quel momento furono stragi, guerre / ... si aprì la via più breve alla crudele morte. / Tuttavia il miser non ne ha colpa! Siamo noi che usiamo malamente / quel che egli ci diede per difenderci dalle feroci belve" ("Who was it that first invented the frightful arms? / From that moment there have been massacres, wars / ... the shortest route to cruel death was opened. / Nevertheless, the wretch is not guilty! It is we that misuse / that which he gave us to defend ourselves from the ferocious beasts").

⁷ The choice of a quotation from Tibullus is surely not a casual one. Albius Tibullus (ca. 55–ca. 19 B.C.E.) was a decorated Roman military tribune, a soldier-poet, who wrote with authority of the horrors of war: "[...] nec tristia nossem / arma, nec audissem corde micante tubam. / Nunca ad bella trahor, et iam quis forsitan hostis / haesura in nostro tela gerit latere" ("never had I known / sad arms or heard the trumpet with a pounding heart. Now I am dragged to war, and some enemy perhaps / already wears the weapon that will pierce my side") 1.10.11–14; and, "Quis furor est atram bellis arcessere Mortem!" ("What madness to join forces with somber Death in war!") 1.10.33. He was of noble birth,

ancient Rome, and the epigraph adds a classical touch to the film, which is in keeping with a Renaissance milieu. By starting us in ancient Rome, Olmi elongates the temporal scope of his project, and lends an air of timelessness to the issues with which he will deal. He encourages us to engage with Tibullus's words, and consider how applicable they are to Giovanni's day, and indeed to our own. It seems that little has changed with regard to our misuse of potentially deadly technology from the reign of Augustus Caesar to that of Charles V and beyond. By inviting us to project back to ancient Rome, Olmi pushes us to project the story of Giovanni dalle Bande Nere forward to our day, and thus is able to comment on two thousand years of Western history by concentrating on one week in November 1526.

In an operation that he repeats throughout the film, Olmi adapts the opening of Tibullus's "Tenth Elegy," rather than translating the original literally. So as to leave no doubt as to who bares the full guilt and responsibility for the countless millions of deaths caused by war, Olmi interprets the original text, intensifying it by rendering Tibullus's rhetorical question into an exclamative assertion: the original, "An nihil ille miser meruit, nos ad mala nostra / vertimus, in saevas quod dedit ille feras" ("Or was the poor wretch blameless? Do we turn against ourselves the blade intended for wild beasts?")⁸ becomes "Tuttavia il miser non ne ha colpa! Siamo noi che usiamo malamente / quel che egli ci diede per difenderci dalle feroci belve" ("Nevertheless, the wretch is not guilty! It is we that misuse that which he gave us to defend ourselves from the ferocious beasts"). Olmi emphatically absolves the sword's inventor, be he god or mortal, despite Tibullus's original formulation, which implies that there may be some doubt as to his blame. For Olmi there is no question that it is the collective fault of humankind that we have turned a useful tool into an instrument of destruction, effectively reversing the revolutionary, messianic vision found in the Books of Isaiah and Micah: "They shall beat their

but his style is less refined than other Latin poets of his age: his works generally have a rustic, unpolished feel to them, and his genre of preference was the elegy. He was much admired in his day, and died at an early age. These characteristics make of Tibullus an ancient counterpart to Giovanni de' Medici. Unless noted otherwise, translations of Tibullus's poetry are from Albius Tibullus, *Tibullus: Elegies*, trans. Guy Lee (Cambridge: St. John's College, 1975).

⁸ *Aliorumque carminum libri tres*, ed. F. W. Lenz and G. C. Galinsky (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 1.10.

swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.”⁹ Olmi also excises the second line of the poem, “quam ferus, et vere ferreus, ille fuit” (“hard he must have been, and truly iron-hearted”)¹⁰ in order to deemphasize the vilification of the mythical inventor, and keep the reader’s attention focused on the sword, its effects, and our own culpability.

By attuning us to literary sources from the film’s initial moments, Olmi prepares the audience for the first character we see speak: as we are introduced first to Pietro Aretino and then to some of the other lead characters in a series of portrait-like shots, the voice of Aretino (which we now realize is the same voice that just finished reciting the quote from Tibullus) speaks to us, quoting from his famous letter to Francesco degli Albizi (1526),¹¹ which recounts, in precise and touching detail, the struggle and death of Giovanni dalle Bande Nere, which Aretino witnessed firsthand. This 1500-year textual leap from the citation of Tibullus to that of Aretino, each read by the same voice, signals a double feat. It celebrates the innovations of Renaissance philology, literature, and historiography—which marked a new way and perspective from which to engage with the works of antiquity—and the innovations of cinema—which allow for startling manipulation of time and juxtaposition of diverse moments. This leap also implies the potential for an analogous leap forward, from the mid-sixteenth century to the early twenty-first century, encouraging us to consider where the development of the technology of warfare has led us from Giovanni’s days to our own.¹²

The shot that Olmi uses to introduce Aretino and the other main characters (with the exception of Giovanni) is a remarkable one. He presents each character separately, in a series of carefully composed, semi-static, portrait-like shots. The characters’ names, titles, and years of birth and death appear on the screen, as if we were walking along the wall of a museum, reading the label text placed next to each portrait as we pass

⁹ Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3. This image is not chosen at random. Later in the elegy Tibullus parallels the prophetic formulation quite closely in painting his pastoral ideal: “Pace bidens uomerque nitent, at tristia duri / militis in tenebris occupat arma situs” (“In peacetime hoe and plowshare shine while rust in the dark attacks the soldier’s cruel weapons”). Tibullus, 1.10.49–50.

¹⁰ Tibullus, 1.10.2.

¹¹ Pietro Aretino, *Lettere. Libro I*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1997), vol. 1, 54–59.

¹² The invitation to the spectators to perform an imaginative leap forward as well as back in time is made more explicit at the end of the film with a declaration by Giovanni’s esquire, which acts as a kind of bookend to Tibullus’s opening epigraph. I will discuss the esquire’s declaration below.

by. The style that Olmi achieves is a patently mediated one: he does not naively aspire to an authentic recreation of the period; rather he deliberately signals the presence of the visual signs which denote “Italian Renaissance” to a twenty-first-century audience. His compositions do not directly reflect the reality they represent, but refract it through the visual and artistic patrimony which that reality has bequeathed to its modern progeny.

Although Giovanni is the protagonist of the film, Pietro Aretino emerges from the beginning as a character of equal importance. When he is first introduced to us, we see him not as he may have appeared to a contemporary of his as he is posing for a portrait, but as he would appear to us in his portrait, hanging on the wall of a museum, five hundred years after its painting. This is a subtle distinction but, I believe, an important one for Olmi’s project. The director’s mediatic signals are not a constant or distracting presence throughout the film, but they leap out at us intermittently as occasional reminders that what we are looking at is an artistic representation of history—*qua* form of mediation—not an attempt at direct representation of the events and personages themselves.

The Epistle, Pietro Aretino and Giovanni dalle Bande Nere

Aretino’s presence at Giovanni’s military camp and at his deathbed is historically accurate. The Tuscan writer sought refuge and protection under Giovanni twice: first in 1524, and then again in the months leading up to the *condottiere*’s demise, during which time their rapport evolved from that of companions in diversion and amusement to that of trusted friends, as Aretino became a sort of political advisor to Giovanni, and Giovanni assumed the role of Aretino’s protector. At the *condottiere*’s side, the writer regained the freedom of expression that had been denied him in Rome.¹³

Already early in the film, Aretino comes to be associated with the epistolary genre. The epistle, or more specifically, the prose letter in the vulgar tongue,¹⁴ becomes for Olmi the quintessential Renaissance literary genre, and he populates his film with them from beginning to end. He shows us

¹³ See Paul Larivaille, *Pietro Aretino* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1997), 120.

¹⁴ This formulation is used by Claudio Guillén in his important article on the Renaissance epistle, “Notes toward the Study of the Renaissance Letter,” in *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*, ed. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1986), 72.

letters being written, read, recited, dictated, and imagined. We see diplomatic missives, military updates, love letters, and family correspondence; letters of urgent necessity, touching sincerity, political exigency, mundane domesticity, and unscrupulous subterfuge: letters are the main form of communication among the Italian nobles, and between the outside world and the world of the Medici military camp. The personified symbol of this world built on epistolary communication is Pietro Aretino, who is the first character we hear and see speak in the film. He is inextricably linked to the epistolary form, not only through his extra-filmic bibliography, but also within the film: this association is established, after the initial epigraph, by the first words we hear, which, as noted above, are spoken by Aretino and are lifted out of his letter to Francesco degli Albizi. The first letter we see is also in the hands of Aretino, as he takes down Giovanni's dictation for a dispatch to Francesco Maria della Rovere, the commanding general of the Pontifical army. With these two firsts, Olmi, through the character of Aretino, establishes the epistle, both aurally and visually, as the primary means of diegetic communication. Indeed, although he is not always on camera, and although other characters occasionally recite letters, Aretino remains the primary narrative voice and letter writer for the entire movie. This is not to say that he is the prime focalizer of the film, though there are a few important scenes that highlight Aretino's role as witness and chronicler, which I will address shortly.

Aretino's narration is not limited to letters. Olmi highlights Aretino's role as narrator explicitly, both at the outset of the film and in two separate scenes during which Giovanni, in moments of disquietude, asks Aretino to read aloud to him: the first time, the writer reads a quote from Machiavelli; the second time, we see him begin to read, but do not hear his voice. Indeed, for Olmi, Aretino comes to represent the very concept of textuality in the film. Throughout the film, his voice is almost always mediated through some kind of text: the recitation of a letter, the reading of a book. His actions, too, point toward his link to the world of texts: Aretino is almost without exception depicted with a book or quill in hand. It is he who takes down Giovanni's spoken directives, and writes them in letters to various addressees; it is he who reads to Giovanni the writings of others. Aretino is the producer and renderer of texts, and he symbolizes the revolution in the production of texts that was occurring during his lifetime and in which he played a major role: the printing press.

Among his many literary accomplishments, the fact that the historical Aretino is the first *epistolografo* to gather and publish a collection of his own vernacular correspondence alone merits his lasting fame. Although

the published letter is an ancient literary genre, the Tuscan writer radically transformed it, initiating a paradigm shift of genre, and inaugurating a literary trend that would keep publishers occupied all over Europe for several hundred years. Indeed, literary critics often strain to communicate the originality and “newness” of Aretino’s intervention in this regard.¹⁵ In this light, Aretino comes to embody a modern sensibility, just as Giovanni dalle Bande Nere becomes the personification of the outmoded, medieval mind-frame. Their pairing in the film emphasizes the complex state of sixteenth-century Italy, rife with contradictions and antitheses born of the coexistence of what were just beginning to be understood as medieval and modern realities. As Giovanni is forced to cede the field to quicker and more technologically advanced armies, the many missives sent traveling throughout the film act in concert with the hurtling cannonballs as symbols of the speed of modernity. Indeed, although Giovanni de’ Medici is the first character we see, he does not speak in his initial appearance, and he appears with his face completely covered by the visor of his helmet, his eyes effectively blinded and his mouth effectively obstructed by the cumbersome and outmoded armor he wears;¹⁶ while Aretino is the first character we see *and* hear speak in the film, as he stares unflinchingly ahead directly at us, his eyes open to the future.

The many letters found throughout the film mark its historicity, providing a kind of diegetic proof that what we are seeing has really taken place. This is a common enough trope in historical films;¹⁷ however, Olmi uses letters to much more profound ends in his film than those to which they are commonly put. In addition to providing historicity and a diegetic means of communication among characters, the constant correspondence serves to establish communication between the world of the film and the viewer. For as we watch the characters exchange information, we too come to learn of the various political and personal intrigues of the story.

¹⁵ On the newness of Aretino’s endeavor, see Gian Mario and Elisabetta Menetti Anselmi, “Introduzione,” in *Lettere*, ed. Gian Mario Anselmi (Rome: Carocci, 2000); Francesco Erspamer, “Introduzione,” in *Pietro Aretino. Lettere. Libro secondo*, ed. Francesco Erspamer (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo & Ugo Guanda Editore, 1998); Carlo Dionisotti, *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1967), 239–41; Larivaille, *Pietro Aretino*.

¹⁶ This image of Giovanni finds its counterpart at the end of the film, when we see him again in a tight close-up, this time with the visor of his helmet raised, and his countenance fully in view. I will return to this scene below.

¹⁷ For a discussion of the inclusion of “pieces of evidence” in historical films, see Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1980), 61–64.

This arrangement could impose an additional mediated distance between the film and the viewer: having to follow a good part of the plot through the characters' epistolary descriptions instead of watching the characters' actions unfold on the screen could prove alienating to the audience. However, I would argue that Olmi's use of Aretino and of the epistolary genre as mediators achieves the exact opposite effect: it pulls the audience into an intensely intimate relationship with the characters and actively involves us in the plot. For example, as discussed above, after the initial epigraph fades from the screen, the figure of Pietro Aretino appears before us. He fixes his gaze on us through the camera lens as he recites a modified version of the opening of his famous letter of 10 December 1526, in which he movingly describes to Francesco degli Albizi the final hours of Giovanni de' Medici:

Nell'appressarsi l'ora che i fati, con il consenso di Dio, avevano prescritto il termine ultimo del signor nostro, ognuno di noi, scordandosi di sé medesimo, piangeva rammaricandosi che la sorte avesse, senza ragione, portato a morire nel maggior bisogno della guerra un così nobile e valoroso capitano.¹⁸

I would argue that the emotion and intensity with which the film's Aretino recites these 500-year old phrases and the unrelenting directness of his gaze pull us into the action of the film, momentarily canceling the distance of the many years that lie between them and us. Through the skillful combination of sound and image, and the powerful performance of the actor, Saša Vuličević, Aretino's presence and words plunge the spectators directly into the story and into History, and create a sensation of life and of directness: Olmi's film audience has effectively become the addressee of Aretino's letter. This opening up and expansion of the audience of a private epistle is exactly the operation engaged in by Aretino himself when he published his first book of letters in 1538: what Aretino achieved with the

¹⁸ "With the approach of that hour, which the fates with the consent of God had prescribed for the ultimate end of our lord, each one of us, unmindful of himself, cried, regretting that chance had without reason brought to death, when the war needed him the most, such a noble and valorous captain." It is interesting to note that, among the small modifications that Olmi makes to the original text of Aretino's letter, he changes the original "nel maggior bisogno d'Italia" into "nel maggior bisogno della guerra." This minor change shifts the sense significantly from a national/patriotic lamentation to a universal one. Indeed, the idea that it was war, and not Italy, that most needed Giovanni, gestures toward the unknowable course that history could have taken had Giovanni—and all that he stands for—won out over the German cannon.

printing press, Olmi achieves with the cinema.¹⁹ Indeed, it is precisely the intimate nature of the epistolary genre, even if it is only a literary device, that draws us in immediately. This despite the distance placed between the characters and the audience, which is imposed by Olmi's resistance to any temptation to modernize the difficult sixteenth-century language of the original texts, which creates a fruitful tension between the work of art and its spectators. On the one hand, Olmi opens up for us the public and private thoughts of Aretino, which he wrote to his friend and then published; on the other hand, such an operation does not automatically lead to an easy and unproblematic comprehension across time and space. The ideas and images of the film are always mediated through texts, Olmi reminds us, and the spectators must work in order to understand them.

As stated above, the inclusion of letters in cinema is nothing new: indeed it is a standard trope. However, Olmi breaks with the conventional formula of showing the addressee's hand holding a letter as the sender reads aloud the letter's content from off-screen, which creates the sensation of looking over the shoulder of the recipient as he or she reads the letter. Olmi, instead, has the sender address the audience directly, and instead of reading a piece of paper, Aretino recites his words with melodramatic pauses, which highlights the performance-aspect of the scene. It is as if we were present as Aretino formulates these famous phrases: we watch their creation and receive them with the immediacy of a newflash.

Indeed the choice of beginning the film with Aretino's letter, instead of one of the biographical sources cited later in the film, brings the spectator into much more intimate contact with the characters and with the history, because of the very nature of the epistolary genre, which was typically considered a kind of conversation between separated friends, or as Erasmus famously formulated it, himself citing a classical source, "*epistola absentium amicorum quasi mutuus sermo*" ("a letter is like a mutual conversation between absent friends").²⁰ The intimacy implied in

¹⁹ Of course, Aretino was not the first to publish a series of private letters. He quite consciously inserts himself in the long tradition of epistolary literary tradition, stretching back to Cicero. However, Aretino radically alters the genre, expanding its expressive capabilities and breaking through the limitations of classical structure, and thus ushers the book of letters into the modern age.

²⁰ *De conscribendis epistolis* ASD 1–2 225. Erasmus acknowledges Turpilus as his source for this formulation. Although the "letter as conversation" was a common classical and humanist concept, it was not universal. Poliziano, for example, disputes this view, and insists upon the difference in nature between writing and speech. For more on humanist conceptions of the epistolary genre and Poliziano's objection, see John M. Najemy, *Between*

this formulation was an integral part of humanist epistolary theory, and it is this intimacy that we feel as Aretino launches into his letter, foregoing any long, obsequious introduction or honorific titles. The intimate nature of the letter counterbalances the official declaration of Giovanni's death, announced during the flashforward of his funeral described above. These two forms of historical artifact, these two modes of storytelling—the historical chronicle and the private letter—both play a role in Olmi's representation of history in the film.

The use of Aretino's letter to Francesco degli Albizi, which stands apart from the rest of Aretino's *Lettere* for its strikingly open and sincere nature, emphasizes the invitation to the spectators to identify with the intimate and elegiac mood of the film, even as it serves to set the plot in a specific historical period far removed from the audience. From the point of view of the letter, the events described do not take place in a *passato remoto*; rather the memory of the story they tell is still fresh and stinging in Aretino's mind, for he wrote the letter only ten days after Giovanni's death.

Olmi grants us an intimate view of history and of a personal story within that history through his artistic transmutation of these literary documents. This history is explicitly mediated, and through his depiction of the letters, Olmi clearly admits, indeed celebrates, such mediation. For this is not the intervention of the traditional historian, which distances the modern reader from the subject with academic categorization and historiographical theory, but rather that of the artist, which helps the viewer to perceive a larger truth—in this case about the shift towards modernity and about modernity itself—through the fictional representation of a historical and personal event.

Three "Fatal Instruments":

The Firearm, the Printing Press, and the Cinema

The opening citation of Tibullus is paralleled by a declaration by Giovanni's esquire (*palafraniere*) which comes at the end of the film: "A motivo della sinistra sorte capitata al signor Giovanni de' Medici, i più illustri capitani e comandanti di tutti gli eserciti fecero auspicanza affinché mai più venisse usato contro l'uomo la potente arma da fuoco" ("As a result of the grim fate which befell Giovanni de' Medici, the most illustrious captains

Friends: Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori Letters of 1513–1515 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), esp. 49–50 for Poliziano's contrary stance.

and commanders of all the armies firmly hoped that the powerful firearm never again be used against mankind"). From the vantage point of the movie's ending, the pessimism and disquietude of the opening quote are confirmed, even as Tibullus's remark is now shaded with irony when one reflects upon the comparatively primitive nature of weaponry during the poet's lifetime (second half of the first century B.C.E.), and the devastating power of today's *armi da fuoco*. We are left with the sensation of having moved into a new and perturbing realm, where the dangers imposed by our own technological advances have become far more menacing. We feel as if humanity has missed its brief window of opportunity to choose a safer path, as Olmi employs the historical account of Giovanni as an exemplum for the peril of unchecked technological development. What occurs between the two literary citations—Tibullus's at the film's beginning and the esquire's at its end—is an illustration of a key moment in the evolution of martial technology, representative of the end of an era and the beginning of another. The window of time that was open to humanity at the beginning of the development of this technology, during which we could have chosen an alternative path by proscribing the use of gunpowder, closes at the end of the film, as we consider the naïve futility of the esquire's hope for a future ban on all firearms.

What lies between the bookend quotes of *Il mestiere delle armi* is the death of Giovanni. The film is essentially the story of this death: we see flashes of it in the introduction, the opening monologue recounts his demise, the action of the film details his undoing and his suffering, until, ending where it began, we witness his death and funeral. In this way, Giovanni dies three times in the film, making of him a Christological martyr-figure who dies for the technological sins of humanity.

As it is depicted in Olmi's film—and, indeed, as the historical record attests—Giovanni's death is tied closely to technological progress. This fact might lead us to believe that Olmi's film implies that the course of technological advancement necessarily leads to destruction; and that therefore, technology should be categorically mistrusted and eschewed. However, instead of pulling back into a defensive stance of Luddite opposition to all technological development, Olmi turns once again to the Renaissance for an answer to these questions, and finds in the figure of Pietro Aretino, author of the *Lettere*, an antidote to the facile equation of technology to death. The historical Aretino, if nothing else, was a tireless self-promoter; and to this end he was always attuned to new possibilities for acquiring increased notoriety and influence in cultural and political spheres. These possibilities could be technological as well as political

or literary. The key to the stratospheric success of Aretino's *Lettere* was not only the letters' content. First, his use of the vernacular allowed for a much larger public than the traditional Latin letter collections, even as he expanded and cultivated the very language he used; second, Aretino took great advantage of the advent of perhaps the most influential technology of the age: the printing press. Critics have pointed out Aretino's prescient understanding of the burgeoning potential of a close relationship between writer and typographer.²¹ Just as the introduction of gunpowder was flattening the field of battle, so to speak, so too was Aretino's relationship with the publisher of his first two books of letters, Francesco Marcolini, creating a new dynamic of parity which revolutionized book production all over Europe by unsettling the static hierarchies between author and typographer.²² The associations between these two evolving technologies were not lost on contemporary thinkers, as the two epigraphs attest at the beginning of this essay.

The technology of the printing press allowed for a vast dissemination of texts among a much larger and more varied public than ever before, and Aretino was well attuned to the recent expansion of the literary market beyond its traditional borders. Nine months after the explosive success of his *Lettere. Libro primo*, Aretino, with the full consensus of Marcolini, abandoned the expensive and elegant *in folio* format of the first edition, in order to publish a second, more affordable, edition *in ottavo*, with the addition of twenty-five new letters.²³ The change in format expanded the market for the book from a limited circle of wealthy elite to a much vaster public.²⁴

²¹ As Carlo Dionisotti writes, "perhaps Pietro Aretino was the first to understand the importance of a pact that united the new literature with the typographic industry as equals. [...] Between 1535 and 1545, Aretino's alliance with the typographer Marcolini produced in Venice a new type of editorial and literary enterprise." Dionisotti, *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana*, 244.

²² Dionisotti continues his discussion of the effect the Aretino-Marcolini relationship had on European publishing: "It was still a small enterprise, notwithstanding—and perhaps exactly because of—the imaginative brilliance of the two associates. However, from 1541 on, Gabriele Giolito di Ferrara, in competition with Marcolini, developed his editorial enterprise, with which, together with other smaller operations, the new literature conquered for itself the Italian and European markets, and no longer thanks to its humanistic and classical authority." *Ibid.*, 244.

²³ What I am referring to here as the second edition of the Aretino's *Lettere. Libro primo*, is technically called "M2" in philological studies. This is not to be confused with "M3," which is also sometimes referred to as the second edition of the *Lettere. Libro primo*.

²⁴ "[The first edition] was published in January 1538. The volume presented itself in a sumptuous form [...] The *princeps* of the *Lettere*, dedicated to the 'Great Duke of Urbino,'

The tactic that Aretino employed is typical of his subtle understanding of the desires of the public, of the instability of his position and of his text, and of the possibilities afforded him by the technology of the printing press. It would have been easy enough to simply reprint the original text of the first edition in a smaller, less expensive format, but Aretino takes the opportunity of the second edition to add twenty-five new letters to his collection. The motivations were probably manifold for this decision. First, Aretino needed to combat the various unauthorized editions of his *Lettere* which were cutting into his profits (between 1538—when the first edition of the *Lettere* was published—and 1542—when the second book of the *Lettere* debuted—six unauthorized editions of the *Lettere* were published in Venice alone).²⁵ The addition of twenty-five new letters effectively rendered the unauthorized editions obsolete, and generated interest in the re-release of a work published only nine months prior.

However, the strategy of adding twenty-five new letters, all written in the intervening months (between the publication of the *princeps* and the second edition) also speaks to Aretino's interest in constructing his book on what F. M. Bertolo calls, "la più stringente attualità" ("the most pressing relevance to the present").²⁶ This addition changed the expectations of Aretino's readership. Now they could expect, and indeed they came to demand "continual, perishable, and up-to-date pieces of information, rich in revelations, controversy and slander, which could be used on the worldly

presents itself as a gift-book, destined primarily for noble interlocutors, from whose protection and munificence Aretino expected the necessary profits, and for whom he could not use the customary small format for vernacular texts. The *in folio* format, in this case, proves to be a function of the 'royal' receiver of the work," Paolo and Fabio Massimo Bertolo Procaccioli, "Nota al testo," in *Lettere. Libro I*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli (Rome: Salerno, 1997), 535–36. For a more detailed discussion of the transformation of Aretino's *Lettere* through its various editions, see Fabio Massimo Bertolo, *Aretino e la stampa. Strategie di autopromozione a Venezia nel Cinquecento* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2003).

²⁵ Procaccioli, "Nota al testo," 533.

²⁶ Bertolo, *Aretino e la stampa. Strategie di autopromozione a Venezia nel Cinquecento*, 30. Bertolo continues, highlighting the unusual amount of intervention demanded by Aretino of his publishers in order to produce a work which reflected, as much as possible, the most *à la page* reality, even when this meant adjusting the text mid-way through the printing process: "Aretino constructed his book of *Lettere* with the most pressing relevance to the present, and therefore, he needed to make sure, up until the last moment, that letters were printed that could report the actual, up-to-date situation in the present. If alliances changed, if friendships were severed, if political opportunism prompted the omission of some person or other, Aretino had to be able to correct the text, even after printing had begun. To do this, he likewise needed accommodating typographers, willing to risk their work [...] in order to satisfy the requests of a demanding client."

stage.”²⁷ It is the *deperibilità*—the perishability and transience²⁸—and the *au courant* nature of Aretino’s production that are especially important literary developments. No longer are the archetypal letter collections necessarily those that transmit eternal truths to posterity, as is the case, for instance, with Petrarch’s collections. Aretino’s letters, especially from the second edition of the *Libro primo* onwards, are concerned with the *hic et nunc*, the contemporary social and political scenes: and that is precisely what his readers were hungry for. As Francesco Erspamer puts it: “contemporary readers knew that the *Lettere* spoke about them and to them: an *ad personam* privilege, neither renewable nor transferable.”²⁹

Aretino essentially invented a wildly successful genre by tapping into the newly expanding public’s evolving desire for literature through his employment of the vernacular, the great range of topics and personalities addressed in his letters, his exploitation of the instability of his text and of his own persona, and his astute use of the latest technologies, even as he reduced the temporal scope of his project to the sixteenth-century equivalent of real-time. The very idea that a book of letters could represent a form of instant cultural impact, and a not irrelevant source of income for an author, was unthinkable before the advent of the printing press. Aretino was the first to see and seize upon this possibility and in so doing he changed the European literary and cultural landscapes. As Raffaele Morabito succinctly states in his study of Italian epistolography: “That which had been a genre aimed at the few and with a relatively limited circulation, after Aretino becomes a consumer genre.”³⁰

A necessary corollary of Aretino’s focus on his own contemporary society, unabashedly filtered through his own mind and pen, was a rich but fragmented representation of himself and the world of lived experience.³¹ The

²⁷ Francesco Erspamer, “Introduzione,” xxvii–xxviii.

²⁸ Both of the terms “perishable” and “transience,” along with their Italian counterparts, derive respectively from Latin roots which emphasize movement beyond or across: *perire* – *per* (beyond) + *ire* (to go); *transire* – *trans* (across) + *ire* (to go). The inexorable movement implied by the terms is typical both of death (in its inevitable approach), and of technological progress (in its forward pushing momentum towards greater speed and power). They are typical of both the human condition (moving along time towards death and the thirst for speed and power) and of modern, technological society (consumerism based on the easy supersession of knowledge and objects, and ever-faster and more efficient means of development, production, and distribution).

²⁹ Francesco Erspamer, “Introduzione,” xxxiv.

³⁰ Raffaele Morabito, *Lettere e letteratura. Studi sull'epistolografia volgare in Italia* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2001), 104.

³¹ “[The *Lettere*] demonstrate [Aretino’s] arrogance, contradictions and weaknesses—the merits and defects that constitute his identity. Few works allow such direct access to

attributes of Aretino's *Lettere*—their vernacular language, collaborative-technological production, contemporary content, expanded audience, varied and fragmentary nature—push the epistolary collection into a new realm of literature, a new genre. The collection of vernacular letters would become an integral and extremely popular genre in the proceeding centuries; some have even argued, and rightly so I believe, that Aretino's letters form no less than the root of two of the other most important genres of the modern West: the essay and the journalistic article.³²

Without making a claim for a direct, causal relationship, I would argue that all of the major attributes of Aretino's *Lettere* can also be found in the cinema and that in this way, a coherent genealogical line may be drawn (with many intermediate steps, of course) between the two media. Aretino gave the Renaissance new ways of discussing and looking at itself, through a highly restricted—and yet, universally accessible—point of view, and he exploited recent cultural and technological developments in order to reach a wide and diverse audience. He presented his audience with a new framework for understanding their world and the world beyond themselves. For the purposes of Olmi's film, the figure of Pietro Aretino provides an *exemplum in bono* of the positive possibilities for technological advance. He personifies the future, just as Giovanni personifies the past to which he is inveterately tied: the *condottiere* is killed by the new technology that he is reluctant and unable to embrace.³³ Giovanni's inability to exploit the rapidly developing technology of warfare leads to his defeat;

Renaissance culture and to its mechanisms of interaction and self-definition: a perspective from within, according to its own norms and categories, instead of ours—that which anthropologists call *thick description*. The stories that Aretino relates are never complete: we know neither the precedents nor the endings. They are unforeseen, occasional, unrelated and shifty, like those of real existence. His stories *are* real existence. Whether they are true or false is not very relevant; what makes them authentic is their perishability. [...] [Aretino] intuited that modernity—disoriented in front of a world that is too vast for the gaze and a fluctuating and unreachable interiority—lives by quotidian fragments. But that which it can transmit of itself, from generation to generation, is not those fragments, but only life." Erspamer, "Introduzione," xxxiv.

³² Guillén, "Notes toward the Study of the Renaissance Letter," 92. Erspamer, "Introduzione," xxxiii. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 114–115.

³³ In the film, Giovanni is unsuccessful in acquiring any cannons from either his patron, the Pope, or his alleged ally, Duke Alfonso d'Este. Alfonso replies to Giovanni's request telling him that he has no cannons to spare, when in fact he secretly supplies the Imperial troops with several of them in exchange for money and the promise of the hand of the Emperor's daughter to his son, Ercole.

his political naïveté renders him impotent, despite his physical strength and military experience.

Aretino, on the other hand, survives the story of the film, and furthermore, lives to retell it. Even if we were not aware of the historical Aretino's legendary political savvy, Olmi highlights this facet of his persona by having Aretino read aloud from an unnamed book of Machiavelli in a brief, but important scene early in the film. This scene sets up beautifully the counterpoint between the two figures: *l'ultimo dei condottieri* and *il condottiere della penna*. It is night, and Giovanni and Aretino are both huddled in their cots on opposite sides of a large military tent. Giovanni asks his esquire to fill up a small lamp with oil—"Riempilo, ché duri tutta la notte" ("Fill it up, so that it lasts through the whole night")—as if he were afraid of the dark. And, indeed, Giovanni is framed in darkness. As he lies in his bed, he is covered with a heavy blanket up to his mouth: only his nose, eyes, forehead, and hand are visible. We see only one hand: perhaps a foreshadowing of the amputation of his leg which he will suffer as a result of the injury he will soon sustain; or perhaps his absent hand reinforces the idea that he is weakened and disadvantaged in his battle against a more technologically sophisticated enemy—he is fighting with one hand tied behind his back, as it were. He looks like a wary animal poking its head out of its den. He is troubled, and he asks Aretino to read him something: a request which makes this hardened man of war seem almost like a frightened child at bedtime.

Aretino, on the other hand, is bathed in light: a candle glows near him as he props himself up on one arm: his chest, both arms, and face are all fully visible. He holds his head in one hand and a book in the other. Aretino pauses for a moment and then begins:

Ecco cosa scrive il Machiavello: "La fedeltà dei mercenari al soldo non dura. E perché ti debbono essere fedeli se non ti conoscono? Per quale Iddio o quali santi bisognerebbe far giurare costoro? Per quelli che si adorano o per quelli che bestemmiano? Che adorano, non ne so alcuno. Ma so bene che li bestemmiano tutti. Né può essere più falsa quell'opinione secondo cui i danari sono il nervo della guerra prima ancora della politica..."³⁴

³⁴ "Here is what Machiavelli writes: 'The loyalty of mercenaries to the coin does not last. And why should they be loyal to you if they do not know you? By which god or saint should they be made to swear? By those that they worship or by those that they blaspheme? I know not one that they worship. But I know well that they blaspheme them all. Nor could it be more false that opinion which states that money is the sinew of war, even before politics....'"

At this point, Lucantonio Cuppano, Giovanni's most trusted lieutenant, barges into the tent with news of the treachery of the princes, startling Giovanni, and causing him to grab his sword.³⁵ The subtle cues that we may gather from the *mise-en-scène*, the lighting, the postures of the characters, their dialogue and action, all point to a dichotomy between the two characters who share the same space and yet live in two separate times: Giovanni's day has eclipsed, while Aretino basks in the sun of the present. Giovanni lies half-hidden in the shadows, incapable of reading the signs himself, while Aretino is in the light and fully engaged with the texts and the issues of the day. He effectively tells Giovanni (himself a mercenary leader) that his days are numbered, but the *condottiere* is distracted by the news delivered in that moment and reacts as he always has: by grabbing his sword. The writer holds his head in one hand and a printed book in the other, while Giovanni, initially empty-handed, reaches for his soon-to-be obsolete sword.³⁶

The passage that the character of Aretino reads is actually a pastiche constructed from two separate works by Machiavelli. The first part is lifted from the seventh chapter of *Dell'arte della guerra*: "Why should they obey me if they do not know me? By which god or saint should I have them swear? By those that they worship, or by those that they blaspheme? I know not one that they worship, but I know well that they blaspheme them all." The second is from the tenth chapter of book 2 of Machiavelli's *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*:

³⁵ Lucantonio Cuppano was Giovanni's lieutenant (*luogotenente*), and was solicited after the *condottiere's* death by his nephew, Giovangirolamo De' Rossi, for information regarding his uncle's life. The information that Cuppano furnished De' Rossi was an important source for the biography of his uncle that he wrote some time during the 1540s, *Vita di Giovanni de' Medici detto delle Bande Nere*. See Vanni Bramanti, "Introduzione," in *Vita di Giovanni de' Medici detto delle Bande Nere*, ed. Vanni Bramanti (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1996), 15. Olmi casts Cuppano in the same role in his film: that of witness and informant.

³⁶ The sword is associated with Giovanni's character throughout the film. This connection is established already in the introductory flashforward of his funeral, in which the soldiers that surround his body are holding swords, and a sword is placed on his body. Although it comes to symbolize Giovanni's obsolescence it also has a more positive connotation. In a brief scene early in the movie, Giovanni is having a simple dinner in his field tent with Aretino. The dinner is accompanied not by the elegant music of a chamber orchestra, but by the Spartan clanging of a hammer on the blade of his sword, as a soldier pounds it back into shape after a battle. Arrayed behind him are three other swords, all different one from another. These four swords, all unique, all associated with Giovanni, form a handmade, positive counterpart to the negative image of the four identical, "industrial" cannons, which Alfonso d'Este sells to the Imperial army in a following scene.

Nor can it be more false that common opinion which states that money is the sinew of war. [...] I say, therefore, that it is not gold, as the common opinion cries, that is, the sinew of war, but good soldiers: because gold is not sufficient to find good soldiers, but good soldiers are indeed sufficient to find gold.

It is important to note the liberty that Olmi takes with these texts. He is not averse to editing the sources of his screenplay, even when they are well known texts, as here where he has Machiavelli say that *la politica*, not *i buoni soldati*, is *il nervo della guerra*. By substituting “good soldiers” with “politics” as the sinew of war, Machiavelli’s discourse changes from one that Giovanni’s character could perceive as laudatory, as it places him—as the archetypal “good soldier”—at the center of the martial organism, to one that marginalizes him and emphasizes the centrality of the backroom machinations that he despises. Here, Olmi has Aretino, through Machiavelli, reveal to Giovanni the tangential nature of his role in deciding his own destiny and the destiny of the war. It will be decided for him in the political maneuvering of the disloyal princes, and his worth and skill as a soldier will come to mean nothing when faced with this new kind of war.

Aretino and Giulio Romano: Art and Architecture in
Il mestiere delle armi

In another shot Aretino comes to embody not only the narrative voice but the movie camera as well. At a climactic moment of the film, when Giovanni is about to have his leg amputated, we see the *condottiere* in his sickbed surrounded by a group of people: the doctor, his assistant, and a retinue of soldiers. The camera cuts to Aretino, who is not at Giovanni’s bedside, but is standing instead behind the semi-closed door to the room, peering through the narrow opening between the door and the doorframe. The shot only lasts four seconds, but as the tension increases and the operation is about to begin, Aretino draws his head back and to the side, pulling the door with him, until only one of his eyes is left peering at the terrible scene before him. This reduction from two eyes to one is analogous to the shift between our stereoscopic sight and the monoscopic gaze of the camera. Olmi here is signaling the passage from the first-hand account of the historical Aretino, who was in fact an eyewitness to Giovanni’s amputation, to the further-removed cinematic account that Olmi has created. Aretino’s movement back and away from the camera,

into the dark and unknowable recesses of a room beyond the camera's vision signals not only the limits that time imposes on knowledge but it also acts at the figuration of the move from the stage of history into the dark space of the movie theater: the transition from the world of lived experience to the world of the imagination. Cinema's rendition of history is a monoscopic affair: a sliver of light bounded by immeasurable depths of an inscrutable past. And yet, within this sliver of light, truth may be illuminated; a story may be recovered and re-elaborated. By placing Aretino in the dark, and granting him an explicitly partial view of the events, Olmi is in effect aligning Aretino's diegetic position with his own position as filmmaker—Aretino's eye becomes the camera lens, his mind, the director's imagination—and highlighting the unseen as well as the seen, just as the movie screen implies by its sharp borders all that is hidden beyond its edges.³⁷

This strategic use of architecture to position figures in certain roles and to enrich historical and philosophical connotations is another layer of Olmi's masterful treatment of the material. Although Olmi shot the exterior scenes of the film along the Danube in Bulgaria, he filmed the interior scenes in Italy—and specifically, in Lombardy—in various period structures in Mantua, Soncino, Ferrara, and Torre Pallavicina.³⁸ The director clearly chose carefully the rooms and courtyards in which he filmed, perhaps not in order to find the actual places where these events took place, but rather to engage the architecture as an active participant in the film, not merely as a picturesque backdrop. The copiously decorated walls and ceiling of Giovanni's sickroom are in the style of Giulio Romano's interventions in Mantua on behalf of Federico II Gonzaga, the most famous examples of which are to be found in the Palazzo del Te and in the Palazzo Ducale. The highly dynamic and expressive figures, charged with extreme emotions, engaged in various contortions, and depicted from a myriad of points of view are typical of Giulio's style, which owes much to two of the most towering artists of the Italian Renaissance: Michelangelo and Raffaello. The frank eroticism and popular style he employs evidence his well-known (and, at the time, scandalous) association with

³⁷ For a discussion of the cinema's implication of the hidden, see Francesco Casetti, *L'occhio del Novecento. Cinema, esperienza, modernità* (Milan: RCS Libri, 2005), 77–83.

³⁸ Olmi traveled to Bulgaria to shoot the exterior shots along the Danube, because the Northern Italian countryside of the Po Valley, where the historical events depicted actually took place, had become too industrialized. See Eugenio Bruno, ed., *Film discussi insieme 2002* (Milan: Centro Culturale San Fedele, 2002), vol. 42, 186.

Pietro Aretino.³⁹ Olmi uses quite effectively selected sections of the wall and ceiling decoration to introduce and reflect the various states of mind of Giovanni as he lies in bed: expressing fear, lust, and violence.⁴⁰ These dynamic, expressive and contorted images are especially conducive to cinema and, indeed, Olmi is not the first to make this connection. A prominent figure of the Italian Enlightenment, Francesco Algarotti, writing to a friend in 1744, communicates his disapproval of Giulio's Mantuan painting by making a prescient comparison between the Sala dei Giganti in Palazzo del Te and the eighteenth-century precursor to cinema: "quanto fu Giulio Romano eccellente nell'architettura [...] altrettanto fu egli infelice dipintore. [...] la famosa stanza de' Giganti rassembra in moltissime cose ad una rappresentazion di lanterna magica" ("As much as Giulio Romano excelled at architecture, he was an unsuccessful painter [...] [his] famous Room of the Giants resembles in many aspects a Magic Lantern show").⁴¹ Indeed, Olmi's camera work seems to bring to fruition the seeds which Giulio Romano planted before their time, pulling the figures out of their

³⁹ One of the main scandals that precipitated Aretino's escape from Rome for protection at Mantua, at the camp of Giovanni and, later, at Venice, was the publication of a series of sixteen pornographic sonnets, probably during the summer of 1524. These sonnets accompanied sixteen engravings based on various drawings of sexual positions by Giulio Romano, which came to be known as the *XVI modi*. The obscene illustrations had landed the engraver, Marcantonio Raimondi, in prison. After obtaining the intercession of Pope Clement VII in order to free Raimondi from prison, Aretino, in an act of arrogant defiance, composed sixteen ribald sonnets to accompany the engravings, which were then published together. This whole affair made Aretino many enemies at the Papal court, so that when he lost the Pope's favor, he was compelled to leave Rome. See the introduction to Pietro Aretino, *Sonetti sopra i 'XVI modi'*, ed. Giovanni Aquilecchia (Rome: Salerno, 1992). This is a side of Aretino's legacy which is alluded to only indirectly in *Il mestiere delle armi*, though the association with the erotic paintings of Giulio Romano, some of which we see very briefly throughout the film. Through this association, the figure of Aretino can be said to represent a life force, which is quickly draining from Giovanni. This reinforces the theme of Aretino's survival through writing, art, creativity and technology, in dialectic with Giovanni's death at the hands of these same forces.

⁴⁰ Olmi does not limit himself to the decorations of Giovanni's sickroom. He also splices in sections of frescoes from other locations. For example, as the doctor is about to commence the amputation, Giovanni's eyes pass wildly over the ceiling, and the camera picks out some erotic details of "Jupiter and Olympiad" and "The Banquet of Cupid and Psyche," as if Giovanni were focusing on these works. They are found, instead in the Camera di Psiche, in the Palazzo del Te, designed by Giulio Romano.

⁴¹ Francesco Algarotti, "Lettere sull'Eneide del Caro (Lettera V)," in *Opere di Francesco Algarotti e di Saverio Bettinelli*, ed. Ettore Bonora (Milan & Naples: Ricciardi, 1969), 304–5. Cited in Ernst H. Gombrich, "'Anticamente moderni e modernamente antichi.' Note sulla fortuna critica di Giulio Romano pittore," in *Giulio Romano*, ed. Sergio Polano (Milan: Electa, 1989), 11.

frozen state and supplying, to borrow Bazin's evocative phrase, a "fourth dimension that could suggest life in the tortured immobility" of his art.⁴²

Giulio's architecture plays a prominent role in the film as well, especially in a flashback scene in which Giovanni participates in a joust and banquet, and first spies his future mistress. This scene has no dialogue, so we are left to focus all the more on the images, which are situated in the Cortile della Cavallerizza of the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua. This large courtyard is bounded by the Galleria della Mostra, the Galleria dei Marmi, La Rustica and, on the fourth side, by a *loggiata*. All four sides are dressed in the same manner, devised by Giulio Romano, which features rusticated stonework and spiral columns. The courtyard is a splendid example of Giulio's architectural style, which blends erudite, antique motifs with unique innovations, and an incredible sense of dynamism. Indeed, the rusticated rock—newly quarried stones artificially rendered to appear ancient and weathered—gives the disquieting impression that the stones are regressing to their natural state.⁴³ Meanwhile, the spiral pillars appear to be spinning out of the walls in an illusion of incredible dynamism.⁴⁴ I would argue that the illusion of motion he creates is not only spatial, but temporal as well. The appearance of disintegration created by the rusticated ashlar blocks and the spiral pillars create both the illusion that the structure is much older than it actually is, and that time is acting upon it much more quickly than it actually is. At the time of its construction, it must have created the impression of astounding novelty and profound recreation of ancient styles. It is Giulio who introduces spiral pillars—which call to mind the pillars of Solomon's Temple—to a secular context for the first time since antiquity. The illusion that the pillars are spiraling forward and the ashlar blocks are regressing to their natural state makes for a complex spectacle, and are in part what prompted Ernst Gombrich to resurrect Pietro Aretino's description of Giulio's ideas (*concetti*) as "anticamente moderni e modernamenti antichi."⁴⁵ Aretino's splendid

⁴² André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), vol. 1, 11.

⁴³ Amadeo Belluzzi and Kurt W. Foster, "Giulio Romano architetto alla corte dei Gonzaga," in *Giulio Romano*, ed. Sergio Polano (Milan: Electa, 1989), 196.

⁴⁴ "[Giulio's] invention of pairing the spatial dynamism of the spiral columns with the two-dimensionality of the Rustica's façade and the firmness of the massive ashlar blocks is quite novel. It seems as if the spiral supports are trying to free themselves from the grip of the ashlar blocks, as if their dynamic energy could crack the equilibrium of the entire pavilion." *Ibid.*, 199.

⁴⁵ Ernst Gombrich, "'Anticamente moderni e modernamenti antichi.' Note sulla fortuna critica di Giulio Romano pittore," 12.

oxymoronic formulation comes from a letter he wrote to Giulio in which he praises his friend's talents and "the buildings and paintings that you have created and arranged in this city, which has been embellished and magnified by the spirit of your anciently modern and modernly ancient ideas."⁴⁶ The seemingly contradictory nature of this formulation speaks to the hybridity that is a hallmark of Giulio's project, and to the complex understanding and use of the past, not dissimilar to Olmi's. The projects of both men play with time in complex ways, mediating the distant past through the recent, and re-elaborating for their contemporary audiences the artistic forms of an idealized époque.⁴⁷

Like Giulio, Olmi's use of particular historical monuments is not limited to the creation of an aesthetically pleasing backdrop or a philologically accurate setting. He engages these architectural elements in such a way as to let them evoke for him complex moods and figure for multi-layered concepts of time and history: a contaminated history, which in its re-presentation is marked by "artistic interventions" and "subsequent interpretations."

In the scene set in the Cortile della Cavallerizza, the movement, or the illusion of movement, created by Giulio Romano's imaginative design is echoed and amplified in the billowing tablecloth atop the long table positioned in the middle of the courtyard. This scene constitutes one of Giovanni's internal flashbacks, as he lies dying on his sickbed, and the whole sequence is imbued with an oneiric quality. The dreamlike quality of the scene makes explicit the workings of the imagination, as Giovanni mentally reconstructs his past, his subjective history. The contrasting echo created between the undulating tablecloth and the illusory movement of the façade suggests both the movement through time implied by remembering and history, and the illusion of movement inherent in the cinema, which is, at its most elementary level, a series of still images passed through a projector at a particular speed in such a way as to trick

⁴⁶ Aretino, *Lettere sull'arte di Pietro Aretino*, ed. Ettore Camesasca (Milan: Edizioni del Milione, 1956), 215.

⁴⁷ According to Belluzzi, "There emerges from the art of Giulio Romano a hazily contoured historical vision, and the judgment of epochs in 'decline' appears less resolute. The monuments are taken into consideration in their entirety, together with their historical geology of artistic interventions. Giulio's selective criteria are elastic, and his archeologizing architecture always has some hybrid implications, some touches of the recent past as well as the distant past. The image of antiquity is filtered through his subsequent interpretations, including those which were notoriously unreliable." Amadeo Belluzzi, "Giulio Romano architetto alla corte dei Gonzaga," 207.

the human eye into perceived continuous movement. The illusion of movement is at the heart of remembering—the flight of the mind—and at the heart of the cinematic art. Olmi signals this connection in this particular scene: a figuration of what it means to represent the past in film contained in the transitory, ghostly undulation of the table cloth and the illusionary dynamism of the massive loggia.

Movement implies speed, and the concept of speed is of central importance to Olmi's film and its reflection on the paradigm shifts taking place around its characters. We have already discussed the revolutionary advent of the printing press, which increased the speed of both the reproducibility and the dissemination of texts in Europe. In other words, the Renaissance technology of printing began the rapid reduction in the time required to reproduce a text and, effectively, the distance between authors and readers.⁴⁸ The ever-increasing compression of time and distance as factors for the dissemination of texts has continued to this day, when, in the technologically modern world, time and distance have been effectively eliminated by the transmission of digital media through the internet. Words written in one moment may be read on the other side of the world in the very next moment. The digital revolution we have witnessed in the last quarter century is perhaps only paralleled by the introduction and diffusion in Europe of the moveable-type printing press in the fifteenth century. Like the digital revolution, the invention and utilization of the printing press not only changed the practical aspects of textual reproduction but, just as importantly, it made possible entirely new kinds of writing, including Pietro Aretino's *Lettere*.

Movable-type printing also allowed for the mechanical reproduction of images—namely engravings—which manifoldly increased the speed of artistic exchange.⁴⁹ For the first time, not only text, but also images could

⁴⁸ The incredible shortening of distance (both temporally and spatially) between writer and reader has special connotations and significance for the epistolary genre. One of the distinguishing characteristics of this genre, which sets it apart from many other kinds of writing, is the self-aware acknowledgement of the distance between writer and reader.

⁴⁹ Régis Debray notes the important role the press played in the diffusion of artistic ideas, and links it directly with the photograph and the digital image: "Connected to the book, the engraving [...] linked Antwerp, Basel, Fontainebleau to the 'Land of Art,' Italy; it extended the map of hybridization, integrating the grotesque, the decorative detail and the architectural plan to the world of noble forms. Long before the photograph, the printing press allowed for the first museum of the European imaginary. This then was simply globalized by photographic reproduction; and now it has been miniaturized by the digital revolution." Régis Debray, *Vie et mort de l'image. Une histoire du regard en Occident* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1992), 248.

be reproduced relatively quickly and sent traveling to the farthest reaches of Europe. Of course, the speed at and breadth to which images have been dispersed has only increased since the fifteenth century and, most notably in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the introduction of photography, cinema, television, and the internet. Indeed, cinema represents a major leap in acceleration of the image and is part of this same genealogy. Olmi focuses his movie camera on that moment in history when the printing press—progenitor of our modern media technology society—was in its infancy.

The Cannon's Double Birth between Myth and History

The other technology born in the Renaissance which permanently changed the face and fate of the world, and which is intimately linked with cinema is the cannon and, by extension, the firearm. If the printing press changed forever the concept of speed in the realm of texts and ideas, then the firearm irrevocably altered the concept of speed in warfare and in death. Although the introduction of the cannon had occurred in the thirteenth century, it was initially used almost exclusively against fortifications, as a component of siege warfare. It was not until the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century that the cannon reached a level of technological sophistication which allowed it to be used as an effective weapon against human targets.

The rise of the firearm and the technology associated with it is tied closely to the invention of cinema.⁵⁰ This means that Olmi, too, is implicated, albeit indirectly, in the same technology that began to evolve in the Renaissance and that led to the mechanized mass death of the twentieth century. The cinema could be imagined as a positive result of the technology that also led to the machine gun. Olmi in effect uses the technology of cinema in order to decry the unchecked technological advance of weapons: two sides of the same coin. In order to emphasize this familial connection, the director, master of cinematic technology, represents for us through his film a moment in history when a precursor to that same technology took a fatal turn for the worse. Much like the ancient Greek

⁵⁰ For a theoretical treatment of the familial links between the gun and the movie camera, see Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London and New York: Verso, 1989).

pharmakon, which ambiguously denotes both a poison and a remedy,⁵¹ Olmi employs the cinema—one of the most technologically invested art-forms—to shed light on the darker side of a related technology—the firearm—representing it at the moment when its implications were just beginning to be understood, and when humankind could have potentially taken it in a different direction. The positive offspring reflects on its negative cousin, with a retrospective gaze at the moment of their conception and divergence.

Early in the film, Giovanni is shown returning to his tent, where he removes his armor after a skirmish with a small detachment of Imperial troops. As he undresses, he dictates a letter to Aretino, while his esquire inspects the armor. He finds a harquebus-ball imbedded in Giovanni's cuirass, and hands it to Colonel Cuppano. Cuppano then shows the flattened projectile to Aretino and Giovanni:

GIOVANNI (dictating to Aretino): A Francesco Maria della Rovere, [...] e sia piuttosto conveniente travagliare le armate di questi lanzichenecchi con scaramuzze e colpi di mano, infastidendoli e ostacolandoli più di tutto nelle vettovaglie, che è il solo modo per condurli in qualche disordine e vincere gente di tale ordinanza. In fede e obbedienza, Giovanni de' Medici.

CUPPANO: Ecco qua. Un bel compenso per un soldato dei nostri giorni: una palla di archibugio spiacciata proprio come una palanca.

ARETINO: Colonnello Cuppano, le nuove armi da fuoco cambiano le guerre, ma sono le guerre che cambiano il mondo.⁵²

After pronouncing this prophetic statement, Aretino drips red molten wax on the back of the letter he has just written and stamps it closed. The three men exchange glances. Then the camera cuts to a completely different scene: it begins with a close-up of a pile of steaming earth, out of which is being drawn with heavy ropes and pulley a huge lump of dirt. When several workers pound this suspended lump with hammers, the

⁵¹ A vast literature is dedicated to theoretical discussions of this ambiguity. For major contributions to this topic, see René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (London & New York: Continuum, 2005). Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination* (London & New York: Continuum, 1981).

⁵² GIOVANNI (dictating to Aretino): To Francesco Maria della Rovere, [...] rather, it would be more useful to harass these Landsknechte with skirmishes and surprise attacks, harassing them and hampering them, especially at their supply lines, which is the only way to throw them into disarray and win against such well-ordered men. In faith and obedience, Giovanni de' Medici./ CUPPANO: Here you are. A nice reward for a soldier these days: a harquebus-ball, squashed flat as a penny./ ARETINO: Colonel Cuppano, the new firearms change warfare, but it is warfare that changes the world.

dirt falls away to reveal a newly forged cannon. The camera then cuts to Alfonso d'Este, who appears greasy and dirty in his work-clothes as he oversees the progress. The workers forge some small cannonballs, after which they hoist up an empty suit of armor (exactly like Giovanni's) so that it is hanging from ropes at the other end of the long, dark workshop. The cannon is now tied to some wooden supports. Alfonso stands behind the cannon, looking down the barrel at the target as if lining up a shot in a camera's view-finder. Indeed, in the following shot, the movie camera assumes the point of view of the duke behind the cannon, and with a rack-focus shift, brings the initially blurry background into sudden focus, transporting our attention to the targeted suit of armor at the far end of the gallery. The camera and the gun are aligned. Then, the duke lights the fuse and the cannon fires loudly, hurling its ammunition towards the target. The cannonball hits the target on its right side, piercing it straight through. The suit of armor, struck by the force of the cannonball, swings ominously back and forth causing the ropes to creak: an image and sound reminiscent of a hanged man. We are not yet sure exactly under what circumstances, but the fate of Giovanni has now been written and sealed by Alfonso d'Este, just as his letter had been by Aretino in the preceding scene.

The juxtaposition of these three scenes—Aretino's nighttime reading (described earlier), the letter-writing and the harquebus-ball, and the cannon forging—makes clear the centrality of the letter and the cannon, of the written word and the weapon, to this film. The negative connotations of the firearm are unquestionable when compared with the letter, though even the letter is sealed with blood-red wax. In fact, the scene of the cannon founding is explicitly infernal in appearance, replete with flames, smoke and filth, as the flickering glow of the fires and torches creates an eerie chiaroscuro effect. One can almost smell the sulfuric stink that these images produce. Alfonso appears diabolical, with a greasy beard and aquiline nose, as he chomps on an apple while inspecting his handiwork. Not a word is spoken during the entire scene; instead, only the thud of the hammers, the sizzle of molten lead, the crackling of the fires, and the explosion of the cannon are heard, accompanied by the discordant strains of a non-diegetic string section, rising suddenly to a feverish rhythm as the cannon fires.⁵³

⁵³ This scene also has very strong meta-cinematic associations. It bears a striking resemblance (too striking, in fact, to be coincidental) to a parallel scene in the 1940 film, *Lucrezia*

The connection between firearms and Hell became a fairly common *topos* in Renaissance writing, as illustrated in the first epigraph to this essay: Gargantua's letter to his son, Pantagruel in Rabelais's *Gargantua* (1531). It is surely because of the fire and thunderous noise associated with gunpowder weapons, in addition to their destructive power, that such infernal comparisons were made. One of the most remarkable examples of this *topos* in Renaissance literature is found in cantos 9 and 11 of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, in the episode of Cimosco, the nefarious king of Frisia who killed Olympia's brothers and father with his devilish invention when she refused to marry his son. It is in the context of the Cimosco story that Ariosto treats directly, with perhaps his most notorious anachronism, the introduction of the firearm into warfare, and it is here that parallels arise between *Orlando furioso* and *Il mestiere delle armi*. Indeed, it may well be that Olmi derived the title of his film from Ariosto's epic, where, in canto 11, the poet blames the firearm for the end of glory and honor in war—"Per te la militar gloria è distrutta, / per te *il mestier de l'arme* è senza onore" (italics mine)—and bemoans the great reversal that gunpowder weapons have caused, calling into question the accuracy of our moral judgments in a suddenly changing world—"per te è il valore e la virtù ridutta, / che spesso par del buono il rio migliore" ("You have destroyed military glory, and dishonored *the profession of arms*; valor and martial skill are now discredited, so that often the miscreant will appear a better man than the valiant").⁵⁴ This, too, is the story of Olmi's *Il mestiere delle armi*: the consequences of unchecked technological advancement,

Borgia, directed by Hans Hinrich for Scalera Film. Scalera was an important house for the production of Venice-themed Renaissance films, even before it transferred its operations from Rome to Venice during the Second World War (*Il ponte dei Sospiri*, 1940; *Il bravo di Venezia*, 1941; *Capitan Tempesta*, 1942; *I due Foscari*, 1942; *La gondola del diavolo*, 1945; *Il tiranno di Padova*, 1946). Although *Lucrezia Borgia* is by no means explicitly anti-fascist, this scene in particular does allude strongly to the dangers of the fetishization of technology and industrialization, often associated with the imagery of Italian Futurism and Fascism and with German Nazism. Hinrich, a German Jew, had fled his homeland and come to Italy in search of a more welcoming atmosphere; his hopes were not fully realized, however, as he found it difficult to make films in Italy, as well. So, while he was in no position to openly rail against the regime, he certainly saw it in a critical light. Olmi's appropriation of this scene is an intriguing choice, as he makes an argument similar to the one Hinrich had made sixty years prior about the dangers inherent in technological advancement.

⁵⁴ *Orlando furioso* 11.26. All citations of *Orlando furioso*, hereafter abbreviated *OF*, are from Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1997). All English translations of *Orlando furioso* are from Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, trans. Guido Waldman (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

and the self-reassessment in which humanity must engage in the face of such shifts.

In Olympia's recounting of the events surrounding Cimosco's attack, she stresses the sheer wickedness of the Frisian king and the utter newness of his weapon: "[Cimosco è] sí astuto in mal far, ch'altrui niente / la possanza, l'ardir, l'ingegno giova; / porta alcun'arme che l'antica gente / non vide mai, né, fuor ch'a lui, la nuova [...]" ("Not only is [Cimosco] so wily in his evil way that no one's strength, courage or cunning is of any use against him: but he also has a weapon quite unknown to our forefathers, or indeed to any of our own generation, himself apart")⁵⁵ and she recounts with grizzly detail how Cimosco killed her two brothers:

[Cimosco] Pose due volte il nostro campo in rotta
con questo inganno, e i miei fratelli uccise:
nel primo assalto il primo; che la botta,
rotto l'usbergo, in mezzo il cor gli mise;
ne l'altra zuffa a l'altro, il quale in frotta
fuggia, dal corpo l'anima divise;
e lo ferí lontan dietro la spalla,
e fuor del petto uscir fece la palla.⁵⁶

Ariosto, with precise and graphic detail, places the emphasis here on the weapon's seemingly unstoppable power to sow death as it penetrates armor, pierces the heart, slices clear through a man, and cleaves the spirit from the body. It seems as if Cimosco's *inganno* invests him with a supernatural invincibility which changes completely the preconceived notions of battle.

Once Orlando kills Cimosco and frees Olympia's beloved from his prison,⁵⁷ the paladin confiscates Cimosco's weapon, takes it out to sea and casts it into the ocean, crying:

⁵⁵ *OF* 9.28.

⁵⁶ *OF* 9.30. "[Cimosco] twice put our side to flight with his device, and killed my brothers: one in the first attack, with a ball which smashed his breastplate and penetrated his heart; the other he brought down in the second skirmish while he was fleeing in a crowd: he hit him in the back from a distance, and the ball came out through his chest."

⁵⁷ Orlando succeeds in killing Cimosco by charging straight at him. The king fires his cannon at Orlando as he quickly approaches, but misses him, hitting his horse. Orlando, instead of fleeing, leaps off his dying horse and continues his charge toward Cimosco, catching up with him and beheading him. Orlando's victory over Cimosco and his cannon does not so much point towards a failing of the firearm, as it illustrates the modified dynamics of war, altered by the introduction of *armi da fuoco*. As Paul Virilio points out, once firearms enter onto the battlefield, safety can no longer be reached by running away from danger, but rather only by running toward it. Indeed, Olympia's brother failed in his

[...] 'Acciò piú non istea,
mai cavallier per te d'esser ardito,
né quanto il buon val, mai piú si vanti
il rio per te valer, qui giú rimanti.

O maledetto, o abominoso ordigno,
che fabricato nel tartareo fondo
fosti per man di Belzebú maligno
che ruinar per te disegnò il mondo,
all'inferno, onde uscisti, ti rasigno.⁵⁸

The imagery here is explicitly infernal: Ariosto imagines the devil inventing the "damned and abominable device" in the depths of Tartarus, which adds a resonance to Olmi's depiction of the forging of the cannon amid darkness and flames, overseen by the malign and duplicitous Alfonso d'Este. Olmi shows the cannon emerging from the steaming mud like a primeval creation: an anti-Adam, created with the same dust, but for the opposite end. D'Este's workshop is dark and cavernous with no openings to the outside, a chthonic dungeon, lit only by fire. Even the apple that d'Este is masticating as he oversees the forging of the cannonballs reaches us as an echo of Ariosto's comparison of the damage done by the cannon as "quasi non minor di quello scempio / che ci diè quando Eva ingannò col melo" ("almost greater than the ruin sown on us when [the devil] tricked Eve with the apple").⁵⁹

The vanity of Orlando's hope of ridding the world of firearms by casting the prototype into the sea is evident to modern readers just as it was to

attempt to run away from Cimosco, while Orlando succeeds only by rushing toward death: "Everything in this new warfare becomes a question of time won by man over the fatal projectiles toward which his path throws him. Speed is Time saved in the most absolute sense of the word, since it becomes human Time directly torn from Death. [...] Salvation is no longer in flight; safety is in 'running toward your Death,' in 'killing your Death.' Safety is in Assault simply because the new ballistic vehicles make flight useless; they go faster and farther than the soldier, they catch up with him and pass him. The man on the battlefield has no safety, it seems, other than in a suicidal entrance into the very trajectory of the speed of the engines. It is toward this that he is pitilessly pushed by the new military jurisdiction that takes him literally 'between two fires!' From now on, general safety can come only from the masses in their entirety reaching speed. Napoleon expresses it clearly: 'Aptitude for war is aptitude for movement,' and he specifies that one must evaluate the strength of the army 'as in mechanics, by its mass multiplied by its speed.'" Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986), 22.

⁵⁸ *OF* 9.90. "To ensure that no knight will ever again be intimidated by you, and that no villain will ever again boast himself the equal of a good man because of you, sink here. O cursed, abominable device, constructed by Beelzebub in the forge of Hades when he planned to bring the world to ruin by you, back to hell from whence you came I consign you."

⁵⁹ *OF* 11.22 (translation mine).

Ariosto's contemporaries, much as the report at the end of *Il mestiere delle armi* by Giovanni's esquire that, "as a result of the grim fate which befell Giovanni de' Medici, the most illustrious captains and commanders of all the armies firmly hoped that the powerful firearm never again be used against mankind," rings bitterly ironic to our modern ears. Ariosto himself acknowledges the futility of Orlando's action, when, in canto 11, we return to the scene of Orlando's attempt to banish firearms from the world only to find that Cimosco's cannon has been resurrected by a magic spell and taken to Germany. The Germans, we are told, "esperimento / facendone, e il demonio a' nostri danni / assuttigliando lor via più la mente, / ne ritrovano l'uso finalmente" ("tried one experiment after another, and the devil sharpened their wits until, to our detriment, they eventually rediscovered how to use it").⁶⁰ And from there the rest of the world learned the *crudele arte*, which Ariosto blames for the many deaths of the Italian wars that were raging as he was writing his epic.

Like the Biblical creation of humanity in Genesis 1 and 2, Ariosto's creation of the cannon is told twice; and the second telling constitutes a radical shift in the poet's focus. From the mythic realm of the cannon's initial invention in canto 9—the story of Cimosco—the poet pulls the cannon out of the murky depths of legend and places it into the historical world of lived experience for the retelling of its origin in canto 11—German experimentation, spreading subsequently to France, Italy, and "tutte le altre bande / del mondo" ("every nation of the world").⁶¹ By introducing firearms to the epoch of Charlemagne in the first account, Ariosto creates a glaring anachronism, which calls attention to the enormous gap between the fabulous, poetic world of his creation, and the increasingly bloody and anonymous battlefield of early sixteenth-century Italy, producing a kind of "ironic nostalgia."⁶² The second account, which the poet sets "al tempo de' nostri avi, o poco inante" ("in our grandfathers' time, or a little earlier")⁶³ sharply reduces the chronological gap between the narrated events and the reader, and illustrates a much more concrete time than the semi-mythic age of Charlemagne. Once it has been reintroduced to the world, and inserted into history, there is no turning back, and no

⁶⁰ Ibid., 11.23.

⁶¹ Ibid., 11.24. The invention of firearms was commonly attributed to the Germans at the time.

⁶² Indeed, Giuseppe Mazzotta argues that "time is the central concern of *Orlando furioso*." *Cosmopoiesis: The Renaissance Experiment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 45.

⁶³ *OF* 11.22.

possibility for playful, deus-ex-machina solutions. When the epic poet cries out his accusation—"Per te son giti et anderan sotterra / tanti signori e cavallieri tanti, / prima che sia finita questa guerra, che 'l mondo, ma piú Italia, ha messo in pianti" ("Many a baron, many a knight now lies in earth, and so shall many more on your account, before this war is ended which has brought tears to all the world but most of all to Italy")⁶⁴—his indignation at the scope of the bloodshed is palpable in the repetition of "tanti," and his desperation is evident as the verbal tense shifts from past to future in a single verse—"son giti et anderan" (they have gone and will go)—for in the historical world of lived experience there is no end in sight for the violence that has devastated Italy in his time.

Olmi seems to have derived much inspiration and imagery from the *Furioso's* Cimosco story, and he performs a similar rewriting of history, though he dispenses with the initial mythic account of the firearm's origin. Instead of placing the cannon's origin in a foreign, transalpine land, the director situates its infernal forging square in the heart of Northern Italy. From the very beginning of the film, the director places the blame for the destruction it has wrought squarely on mortal shoulders. By making Alfonso d'Este the film's "nemico empio / de l'umana natura, il qual del telo / fu l'inventor" ("the Evil One, enemy of human kind, who invented the fire-arm")⁶⁵ the director historicizes the origin of the firearm and pulls it out of the realm of myth and into the real world of history and politics, even as its creation is enshrouded in mythic imagery. Olmi uses Ariosto's example of looking back to the origin of the firearm and retrospectively imagining its birth in order to understand the ramifications of its development in our own time.

Conclusion

In this masterpiece of Renaissance cinema, Olmi transports us to a specific time and place quite foreign to us. And yet, through the masterful transmutation of historical and literary texts, as well as visual art into cinema, the director speaks to us through images and words about our modern condition from a starting point of its evolution. By contrasting the figures of Giovanni dalle Bande Nere and Pietro Aretino, Olmi creates at once a nuanced portrait of Renaissance Italy, and a complex fiction that

⁶⁴ Ibid., 11.27.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 11.22.

speaks to us of our history and present situation, without ever letting us forget the mediation of cinematic technology through which he is communicating with us. His is a technology born of the very advances that are depicted on the screen: technologies with both positive and negative moral implications, technologies with which we are still struggling today. In the end, Olmi reminds us, it is we who are responsible, for it is we who have the power to use or misuse that which we have been given for our own benefit.

MACHIAVELLI'S USE OF LIVY IN *DISCOURSES* 1.11–15

Jason Taylor

Non sum nescius ab eadem negligentia qua nihil deos portendere vulgo nunc credant, neque nuntiari admodum ulla prodigia in publicum neque in annales referri. Ceterum et mihi vetustas res scribenti nescio quo pacto antiquus fit animus et quaedam religio tenet, quae illi prudentissimi viri publice suscipienda censuerint, ea pro indignis habere, quae in meos annales, referam.

Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 43.13¹

Introduction

Machiavelli is commonly regarded as a decisive figure in the modern movement dedicated to the recovery and restoration of classical modes of thought and practice. At the same time, he is commonly regarded as a founder, perhaps *the* founder, of new intellectual modes and orders. How are we to reconcile these two, very different aspects of Machiavelli's patrimony in the republic of letters? Amongst the many ways of investigating this question, I would like to recommend the careful study of Machiavelli's treatment of religion, and particularly its classical aspects, as one that is especially fruitful. In support of this recommendation, I offer in the present essay an explication of the first sections of Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* explicitly devoted to religion (1.11–15), discourses which

¹ "I am conscious of the fact that the very same negligence which commonly leads people nowadays to believe that the gods foretell nothing also leads to no prodigies whatsoever being publicly reported or recorded in the histories. But in writing about ancient matters, somehow or other my mind takes on an old-fashioned cast; moreover, a certain kind of religious scruple forbids me from considering unworthy of record in my history things which the most prudent men of old judged it necessary to be taken up publicly." Citations of Livy's *Ab urbe condita* (hereafter abbreviated *AUC*) are from *Titi Livi Ab Urbe condita* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955). Citations of Machiavelli's *Discorsi* are from Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la deca di Tito Livio* (Turin: Einaudi, 2000). All English translations are taken from Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

are obviously preliminary, but, on the whole, exemplary of Machiavelli's treatment of religion.

For Machiavelli, the words and deeds of Livy himself, no less than those of the actors Livy depicts in his history, can serve a didactic function. Livy's characteristic habits of mind can serve to define the authorial *persona* Machiavelli assumes in the *Discourses on Livy*. Accordingly, Machiavelli's treatment of religion is a careful, if partial, restoration of Livy's own treatment, one that indicates a complex mixture of skepticism about, deference to, and support for religious things.² The question of what is original in Machiavelli's thinking about politics and religion and the question of whether Machiavelli's thinking about politics and religion was distinctive of his originality would have to be looked at in light of what is traditional, or Livian, in that treatment.

Furthermore, Livy's treatment of religious things cannot be cleanly separated from his regard for the things of the past, especially the venerable and ancient past. As the above quote from Livy makes plain, a certain religious sentiment characterizes Livy's self-awareness about his work as an historian and the recognizably traditional tenor of that work. Indeed, that sentiment puts his work as an historian at odds with the political and literary practices of his contemporaries. This is altogether helpful in judging Machiavelli's own work as a writer, for it is as clear as daylight that Machiavelli is also at odds with the practices of his own time.

This does not mean that we should be immediately tempted, without further evidence, to attribute either Machiavelli's blame of the neglect of ancient practices or his praise of the most prudent men of antiquity (including, presumably, Livy himself) to a *quaedam religio*. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Machiavelli evinces a more than casual interest in Livy's own judgments on corruption in religious matters. Within the first decade of Livy, authorial comments comparable to the one cited above occur at 3.20, 5.21, and 10.40. The events from the general context of

² Scholarly disagreement about Machiavelli's treatment of religion and personal religiosity is remarkably similar to scholarly disagreement about Livy's own treatment of religion and religiosity. I would suggest that the former is partially a function of Machiavelli's imitation of Livy in these matters. For good summaries of the *status quaestionis* with respect to Livy, see P. G. Walsh, *Livy: His Historical Aims and Methods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 46–9; and D. S. Levene, *Religion in Livy* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 16–33. For good summaries with respect to Machiavelli, see Vickie B. Sullivan, "Neither Christian Nor Pagan: Machiavelli's Treatment of Religion in the *Discourses*," *Polity* 26:2 (1993): 259–60; and Marcia L. Colish, "Republicanism, Religion, and Machiavelli's Savonarolan Moment," *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 60:4 (1999): 597–600.

these passages (books 3, 5 and 10) form the core of Machiavelli's examples in 1.11–15. In fact, the passage from Livy's third book, on contemporary negligence in religious matters, is cited by Machiavelli himself in 1.13. The present essay examines how Machiavelli uses Livy in each of the five discourses from 1.11–15 as our first and best means not only for understanding what those discourses say about religion, but also for sensing better what motivates Machiavelli's own criticism of the present and admiration for the past.

Religion and Politics

Machiavelli opens his five discourses on religion by revisiting the political question of the relative priority of religion and arms. In the order of Roman history, Romulus, and not the religious founder, Numa, comes first. However, Machiavelli introduces Numa in 1.11 under a providential aspect that accords with his earlier rank at 1.10: judging the orders of Romulus insufficient for empire, the heavens inspired the Senate to choose a successor who could instill obedience in a people made fierce and warlike under the orders of Romulus.³ However salutary such orders might be with a view to external threats (or foreign policy), they are potentially harmful when it comes to internal stability (or domestic policy). Good arms are necessary for good laws, but religion is necessary for civil obedience. This conversion from the arts of war to those of peace, done to "maintain a civilization," has in turn its own danger, namely, that citizens will become too soft and gentle, but in Livy's account, Numa counters this danger by replacing fear of an external enemy with fear of the gods. Numa's orders insured that men would remember their obligations to the city and their leaders through fear of divine retribution.⁴ In fact, Numa so diverted the thoughts of the multitude from violence and arms toward the divine involvement in human affairs that faith and oaths rather than fear of law and punishments ruled the city.⁵

Machiavelli illustrates this with two examples from Livy, oaths secured by Scipio and by Manlius Torquatus. Presumably, the very lateness of the examples, relative to Numa's own age, attests to the stability and continuity of his orders. Scipio forced the Romans at sword point to swear not to

³ *AUC* 1.18 and 19.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.21.

abandon the fatherland for Sicily. Torquatus forced his father's accuser to swear under threat of death to drop his accusation. In each case, although the oath is secured through violence, and so could not be considered voluntary, the force internal to the oath, that the gods punish those who do not keep their word, proves more binding than love of fatherland, or even personal honor. In spite of this, the circumstances in which religion could operate without the threat of arms are not clear solely from these examples: while religion upholds oaths, good arms are necessary for securing them in the first place. The peaceful orders of Numa are not a complete departure from the fierce orders of Romulus.

It is no surprise, then, that Machiavelli directly confronts the question of the relative rank of Romulus and Numa next, offering the general principle that "where there is religion, arms can be easily introduced, and where there are arms and not religion, the latter can be introduced only with difficulty" ("dove è religion facilmente si possono introdurre l'armi; e dove sono l'armi e non religione con difficoltà si può introdurre quella").⁶ Machiavelli accords first rank to Numa, now on account of the difficulty of the political situation Romulus bequeathed to him, but in doing so, he has by no means settled decisively the question about the relative rank of arms and religion. Further, while it may be the case that divine authority is not necessary for Romulus, it is not exactly the case that Romulus founds the Senate and other civil and military orders without that authority. The auspices by which he was chosen, as well as his establishment of the Ara Maxima and the temples of Jupiter Stator and Feretrius all suggest otherwise.

In fact, the distinction between Numa and Romulus finally does not rest on the founding of religious orders, but on the means by which they do so. Numa does introduce a new and unaccustomed order into the city, namely, a principle of authority other than "naked steel in hand," and does so in a new and unaccustomed mode, a feigned intimacy with the divine nymph Egeria. He did so because he "dubitava che la sua autorità non bastasse" ("doubted his own authority would suffice").⁷ While it is clear that Numa uses divine authority to stabilize the political order by putting it on a religious foundation, it is harder to see the cause of what *was* sufficient in his own authority, the credibility of his pretended counsels with a goddess. Machiavelli endeavors to explain the basis of

⁶ *Discorsi* 1.11; *Discourses*, 35.

⁷ *Discorsi* 1.11; *Discourses*, 34–35.

that credibility in the sequel by turning to a consideration of the need for religion in politics.

Recourse to God in establishing new orders is necessary because the unfamiliar or extraordinary lacks self-evident reasons to show its utility. Its common benefit is not evident because it is new, and so untested. The emphasis, in both Livy and Machiavelli, on Numa's deception *as a deception* can have no other point except to emphasize Numa's political prudence.⁸ For Machiavelli, this prudence means recognizing that no one can mitigate the dangers of taking "una via che, la quale, non essendo suta ancora da alcuno trita" ("a path as yet untrodden by anyone") without recourse to some higher authority.⁹

Does civilization mitigate the need for religion in politics? While Machiavelli at first accords Numa the highest rank because of the *difficulty* of his labor relative to and because of Romulus, in discussing Numa's prudence in itself, Machiavelli now speaks of the *ease* of Numa's labor on the basis of the material with which he worked. "Bene è vero che lo essere quegli tempi pieni di religione e quegli uomini (con i quali egli aveva a travagliare) grossi, gli dettono facilità grande a conseguire i disegni suoi, potendo imprimere in loro facilmente qualunque nuova forma" ("Indeed it is true that since those times were full of religion and the men with whom he had to labor were crude, they made much easier the carrying out of his plans, since he could easily impress any new form whatever on them").¹⁰ One is entitled to ask precisely what labor is required to introduce religion into a people full of religion. In Livy, Numa's instilling the people with a fear of the gods and his deception are of a piece, each connected with the character of the people in those early times. That is, both policies are tailored to their rude and uncivilized nature.¹¹ For Machiavelli, Numa's orders transform the citizens themselves, not merely the institutions of the city, and so, his labor is affected by the quality of the material available.

This attention to the "material basis," so to speak, for the effective manipulation of religion returns us to the question of the status of Romulus as a founder. Livy emphasizes that the military discipline instilled by Romulus prevented a fall into luxury and leisure.¹² Machiavelli speaks from a perspective after such a fall: "che volesse ne' presenti tempi fare

⁸ *AUC* 1.19, 1.21.

⁹ *Discorsi*, Proemio; *Discourses*, 5.

¹⁰ *Discorsi* 1.11; *Discourses*, 35.

¹¹ *AUC* 1.19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1.19.

una repubblica, più facilità troverrebbe negli uomini montanari dove non è alcuna civiltà, che in quegli che sono usi a vivere nelle cittadi dove la civiltà è corrotta” (“whoever wished to make a republic in the present times would find it easier among mountain men, where there is no civilization, than among those who are used to living in cities, where civilization is corrupt”).¹³ Contrary to the general principle above, it does not seem that Romulus made Numa’s job harder, but easier. A civilized people without corruption, the middle ground between credulous savagery and corrupt civilization, is not mentioned. Instead, Machiavelli says that it is easier to civilize the crude than to purify the corrupt.

Machiavelli concludes from the above considerations that Numa’s religious orders were among the first causes of Rome’s happiness. Given the ambivalence in the foregoing account about the precise status of Romulus with respect to religion, it is not surprising that Machiavelli turns from rank-ordering to a plurality of first causes, making Numa now an initial link in a chain that runs from good religion to good order to good fortune to happy success. Sustained observance of divine cult causes greatness in republics, that is to say, sustained success, for that observance of divine cult preserves the fear of God. On the other hand, disdain for divine cult causes ruin, for “dove manca il timore di Dio conviene o che quel regno rovini, o che sia sostenuto dal timore d’uno principe che sopperisca a’ difetti della religione” (“where the fear of God fails, it must be either that the kingdom comes to ruin or that it is sustained by the fear of a prince, which supplies the defects of religion”).¹⁴

The fear of a prince can replace the fear of God, but only imperfectly since a prince is human and so mortal. Hereditary succession is itself unreliable because political office may pass to a successor, but not prudence. Machiavelli’s citation of Dante’s *Comedy* in this context¹⁵ implies that such prudence is a divine gift, but the imperfection of hereditary succession raises the question of how divine cult passes through the generations with stability, uncorrupted. Prudence, as Numa himself shows, is observed at the origins in the act of founding: “Non è, adunque, la salute d’una repubblica o d’uno regno avere uno principe che prudentemente governi mentre vive; ma uno che l’ordini in modo che, morendo, ancora la si mantenga” (“it is the safety of a republic or a kingdom to have not one prince who

¹³ *Discorsi* 1.11; *Discourses*, 35.

¹⁴ *Discorsi* 1.11; *Discourses*, 35.

¹⁵ *Purgatorio* 7.121–123.

governs prudently while he lives, but one individual who orders it so that it is also maintained when he dies").¹⁶ The passage from Dante, however, again would seem to imply that we cannot have a succession of divine cult without a continuous renewal of prudence at each generation.

As we saw above, Machiavelli seems to prefer coarse men for establishing new orders because they are easier to civilize. He now qualifies that preference. It is possible to persuade civilized men, now understood as those who *presume* that they are *not* coarse. Machiavelli emphasizes this presumption by stating that it did not *appear* to the Florentines that they were either coarse or ignorant. Yet, considering that they were as credulous about Savonarola and God as the early Romans were about Numa and Egeria, one wonders how refined the human material can become. At any rate, the distinction between early and late with respect to founding religious orders does not seem to be decisive.

Machiavelli is reserved, and even modest, about the truth of Savonarola's speaking with God. While Machiavelli follows Livy in his skeptical regard of Numa's access to the divine, he neither affirms nor refutes the case of Savonarola. As will become clear below, this is at least partially because in this regard he again follows Livy, who in some instances is inclined to reserve judgment with respect to the truth or falsity of religious things. Machiavelli concludes from Savonarola's success, in material circumstances arguably more difficult than those of Numa, that no one should fear that he cannot accomplish what has been done before: "gli uomini, come nella prefazione nostra si disse, nacquero, vissero e morirono sempre con uno medesimo ordine" ("for as we said in our preface, men are born, live and die always in one and the same order").¹⁷ Underlying the various moments in the cycle of a political order, from its primitive beginnings through corruption to ruin, there is a constancy of order, similar to the human cycle of birth, growth, corruption, and death. In his preface, Machiavelli affirms this constancy not only for human things, but also for the heavens. Machiavelli's first discourse on religion begins with the providential intervention of the heavens in Roman affairs and ends with a modern example and an affirmation of the natural, or scientific approach, which presumes the availability and intelligibility of the Roman past to the present. Accordingly, the emphasis shifts in the course

¹⁶ *Discorsi* 1.11; *Discourses*, 36.

¹⁷ *Discorsi* 1.11; *Discourses*, 36.

of his discussion from divine providence to human prudence as forms of agency governing human affairs.

The Roman and Christian Religions Compared

We have been prepared by the treatment of both the pagan Numa and the Christian Savonarola for the heading of the following discourse, 1.12, which indicates, first of all, a treatment of religion more general than in the case of either Roman paganism or Christianity and, secondly, a specific consideration of the political failures of the Roman Church with respect to Italy. Throughout this section, Machiavelli draws our attention to the linkage between political cynicism about the rulers' interest in the good of the ruled and religious skepticism about divine interest in the human good. The dominant theme of Livy's first decade is the unceasing struggle between the Roman orders over the increased political franchise of the plebs. Where there is concord between the orders in this struggle, Rome extends its political dominance in Italy and there are miraculous omens of divine favor. In this section, Machiavelli traces not only political ascendance, but also decline, signaled by incredulity about the public spiritedness of the patricians and incredulity about the providence of the gods. Machiavelli states that the soundness of a principality or republic depends on maintaining its religious ceremonies, and that no sign is more ominous for a political order than neglect of divine cult. Every religion has some principle order for its foundation, and when that foundation is clear, the connection between religious and political decay is equally clear.

Machiavelli illustrates these generalities by tracing, in brief, the cursus of genesis and decay in Gentile religion from its original foundation, the responses of oracles and divination. All later forms of veneration emerge from this original, providential principle because it established a fundamental sense of obligation to the gods. The corruption of that principle begins when the interests of the powerful dictate the content of oracular predictions. As the fraud of that coincidence became manifest, it undermined both the notion of providence and the sense of what is owed to the gods. Subsequently, having become incredulous, men are "atti a perturbare ogni ordine buono" ("apt to disturb every good order").¹⁸ Belief, and the obligations that it engenders, tend toward the stability of order.

¹⁸ *Discorsi* 1.11; *Discourses*, 37.

Having traced the course of Gentile religion, Machiavelli returns to generalities. He states that princes can hedge against corruption in republics by maintaining their foundations. Such princes should favor and magnify all things which arise in favor of religion, even if they judge them to be false. Indeed, the more prudent and knowledgeable they are about natural things, the more this advice applies to them. Insofar as these princes are aware of the utility of the false, their prudence and knowledge resembles that of founders.

However, Machiavelli now considerably enlarges the sphere of things which might be regarded as false: “perché questo modo è stato osservato dagli uomini savi, ne è nato l'opinione de' miracoli che si celebrano nelle religioni eziandio false” (“[b]ecause this mode has been observed by wise men, the belief has arisen in miracles, which are celebrated even in false religions”).¹⁹ Machiavelli moves from things the pagans regarded as false to paganism itself as false, but he does not make clear why religion as such is not susceptible to the prudence of princes. Miracles are celebrated even in false religions because the prudent enlarge upon miraculous occurrences and their authority renders them credible. Although this implies an authentic basis for miracles in true religion, the similar credibility of the miraculous conversations of Numa and Savonarola, and even Machiavelli's prudential suspension of judgment about the truth of the latter, blurs the distinction between a pagan founder of a false religion and a Christian priest of the one, true religion.

To illustrate his observations about miracles, Machiavelli again descends from a general perspective to a more specific one, this time drawing his example from Livy's account of the final sack of the Veientes. Young men, in the manner of worshippers rather than pillagers, purified and dressed in white robes, enter the temple of Juno to take her image back to Rome. The larger context of this episode is worth noting: in general, book 5 is marked by Livy's most vigorous association of Roman piety and Roman success. Further, *after* the sack of Veii by Rome and *before* the near sack of Rome by Gaul, the Romans debated the possibility of moving from Rome to Veii, which would amount to an abandonment of the fatherland by the plebs. Not quite in keeping with the magnified atmosphere of reverence that Machiavelli conveys in his version of events, Livy traces the motive for the question, “Will you go to Rome?” to either divine spirit or youthful joking. In addition, Livy reports her miraculous assent, first silent, then

¹⁹ *Discorsi* 1.12; *Discourses*, 37.

voiced, as a *fabula*, a piece of poetry rather than history. Just previous to this incident, Livy had reported another *fabula* of similar quality with the useful addition of his opinion about its truth: in matters of such antiquity, it is sufficient to accept verisimilitude on behalf of truth; such events, more appropriate to the exhibitions of the stage and its fondness for miracles than to faith, Livy is not inclined to affirm or refute.²⁰

Livy's suspension of judgment here reminds us of Machiavelli's own attitude with respect to Savonarola, but both differ, in some sense, from the practice of Camillus: "la quale oppinione e credulità da Cammillo e dagli altri principi della città" ("[t]hat opinion [of Juno's assent] and credulity were altogether favored and magnified by Camillus and the other princes of the city").²¹ A prudent leader in no way undermines the credibility of religion, but offers it his full support. Such support demands affirmation rather than silence. Ideally, affirmation and silence would be united in the kind of thinker or philosopher who possessed both science, a knowledge of natural things, and prudence, the apprehension of what is good for oneself and other human beings.

In the next transition, Machiavelli does not return to the general level, but moves from Roman to Christian orders, stating that the Roman Church has destroyed the foundation of Christianity: "La quale religione se ne' principi della republica Cristiana si fusse mantenuta, secondo che da il datore d'essa ne fu ordinato, sarebbero gli stati e le repubbliche cristiane più unite, più felici assai che le non sono" ("If such a religion had been maintained by the princes of the Christian republic as was ordered by its giver, the Christian states and republics would be more united, much happier than they are").²² In saying that Christian princes, in their present usage, have departed from what was ordered by their founder, he does not state, as he did for the Gentiles, what the foundation of the life of the Christian order is. Instead, Machiavelli concentrates on corruption, and so implies that he is well disposed to Christianity's sound foundation. Machiavelli's natural account of religious and political decay leads to conjectures that assume an almost prophetic tone in the Christian context: Christianity so differs from its origins at present that its end or scourging is nigh. On the one hand, Christianity's ruin would seem to conform to the natural course of life. On the other hand, its purification would presumably be the work

²⁰ *AUC* 5.21.

²¹ *Discorsi* 1.12; *Discourses*, 37.

²² *Discorsi* 1.12; *Discourses*, 37.

of a prince of divine prudence and science, one whose renovation would return present vices to past virtues.

Machiavelli fortifies his position against the present corruption of Christian orders by refuting the proposition that the Roman Church has given rise to the present well-being of Italy's cities. He will argue that Italy is presently in a state of political disorder, and this disorder can be traced to a more fundamental religious disorder. Machiavelli offers two reasons that show the Church is the cause of Italy's ruin; these causes are obligations Italy owes to the practice of the Church. First, because its princes are without religion and wicked, their followers are obliged to conform to their example. Second, Italy must remain divided, and so, unhappy, for the Church is too weak to unite Italy, too powerful to submit to unity under another head. This argument resembles that moment in Machiavelli's portrayal of Gentile religion when the oracles "cominciarono di poi a parlare a modo de' potenti" ("began to speak in the mode of the powerful").²³ The Church, in its fear of losing dominion over its temporal things, to say nothing of the wickedness of its priests, relinquishes its claim to know better the will of God, the very basis of its moral authority. Unlike pagan Rome, whose total political dominance of the province is due to its own arms and serves to unify Italy, the Roman Church's partial dominance is due to the arms of others and stands as an obstacle to such unity. In this respect, it resembles some of pagan Rome's more stubborn adversaries, in particular, the impious Veientes of the present context and the Samnites of whom Machiavelli discourses in the conclusion of this section.

Machiavelli concludes his argument against the Church with a kind of political experiment: if all the court of the Roman Church could be rusticated by force to the towns of the Swiss, who alone live in conformity with the purity of ancient orders, one would observe, in the sure and rapid corruption of the Swiss, the true extent of the present corruption of the Church. Such an experiment, if possible, would be ruthless from the moral point of view, but effective from what one might call the scientific point of view. Previously, Machiavelli had predicted that the scourging or ruin of the Roman Church was near. The hypothetical situation which concludes 1.12 shows that the ideal thinker or philosopher, if his predictions are to be more than divinations, does not simply subordinate his knowledge of natural things to prudent silence about the truth of miraculous things.

²³ *Discorsi* 1.12; *Discourses*, 37.

The Uses of Religion

The heading of 1.13 lists three functions in the service of which the Romans put religion: reordering the city, carrying out enterprises, and stopping tumults. The first two functions in Machiavelli's treatment form a natural pair, grouped together at the beginning of the discourse and supported by events from the fifth book of Livy, dedicated to Camillus's sack of the impious Veientes. In some sense, these events suggest a continuity with the previous discourse, whose one Roman example also came from the fifth book. Stopping tumults is separated from this pair and illustrated by reference to the third book of Livy, dedicated to the decemvirate. The first two examples show how the patricians, first in domestic, then in military affairs, restrained the impulses of the plebs by means of religion. In that sense, they resemble the example of Scipio in 1.11. The third example illustrates how the patricians used religion to check the influence of the tribunate over the plebs. In that sense, it resembles the example of Manlius Torquatus. The theme that guides all three examples is the prudent use of religion by the ruling or principle element of the political order.

Following the election of all the tribunes from the plebian class save one, the nobles interpreted certain natural disasters and prodigies of that year as portending divine displeasure at a corrupting innovation within the institution of the tribunate. According to the patricians, the only remedy in a new election was to restore the old orders. Out of fear of divine retribution, the plebs created tribunes entirely from the patrician class. In accordance with sound political practice, Machiavelli magnifies the religious element of Livy's account by omitting the human element. Livy shows that the patricians did not simply leave matters in the hands of religion alone, but also put forward for election that year their most distinguished candidates.²⁴ This general procedure differs from that found in Livy at 4.56–57, of which Machiavelli discourses in 1.48, in which the best among the patricians and the worst among the plebs are sponsored by the nobles in order to discredit the plebs. Although the patricians arguably gain more by association with the highest rather than by contrast with the lowest, such gains are entirely contingent on the occurrence of disasters or prodigies. This use of religion is dependent on external circumstances outside of one's political control.

²⁴ AUC 5.14.

Machiavelli's shift to the Lake Albanus prodigy is closely connected in Livy's account, which moves from the resolution of the *discordia* between the plebs and patricians, in favor of the latter, to the resolution of the conflict between the Veientes and the Romans, in favor of the latter. Divine interpretation figures decisively in tipping the scales in both conflicts, and both episodes are most closely linked in the debates between the patricians and the plebs over winter campaigns against Veii.

Machiavelli says that during the siege of the town of the Veientes, Roman soldiers grew restless, but were made constant by a prodigy: "trovarono i Romani come Apollo e certi altri risponsi dicevano che quello anno si expugnerebbe la città de' Veienti, e che e' si derivassi il ago Albano" ("the Romans found that Apollo and certain other responses said that the city of the Veientes would be captured the year that Lake Albanus overflowed").²⁵ Interpreted as a sign of the impending and successful conclusion of the military campaign, the prodigy strengthened the resolve of the soldiers. Again, Machiavelli omits elements from Livy's account which emphasize the human dimension. In Livy, it is not the rising, but the complicated draining of Lake Albanus that ultimately signals the fall of the Veientes. In general, Machiavelli's omissions magnify and, in this sense, distort Livy's own account of the manner in which interpretation of miraculous circumstances unified the Romans and fortified their common political will.

While the previous two examples were concerned strictly with one mode of religion, the interpretation of signs, the third example combines this mode with another, the obligation of oaths. From a political perspective, the latter mode is more self-sufficient in that it relies less on external circumstances for its operation. Machiavelli thus exemplifies the political situation: "Erano nati in Roma assai tumulti per cagione di Terentillo tribune, volendo lui proporre certe leggi" ("Tumults had arisen in Rome caused by the tribune Terentillus when he wished to propose a certain law").²⁶ The gravity of that situation can be felt by comparing the conclusion of this section with the preceding: reordering the city and carrying out enterprises would have been conducted with difficulty without religion. However, in the case of stopping tumults, "la religione fece al senato vincere quelle difficoltà che senza essa mai averebbe vinte" ("religion made the Senate overcome the difficulties that would never have been

²⁵ *Discorsi* 1.13; *Discourses*, 39.

²⁶ *Discorsi* 1.13; *Discourses*, 40.

overcome without it").²⁷ The necessity Machiavelli wishes to invoke occasions his shift from the fifth book of Livy to the third, that is, to the crisis of the decemvirate.

Against the Terentillian law, the Senate first used the Sybilline books to warn that civil discord that year would lead to a loss of freedom. According to Machiavelli, although the tribunes exposed this warning as fraudulent, the plebs were inclined to err on the side of caution and suspend tumults over the law. One would be hard pressed to find evidence in Livy to support the successful account of this tactic: the Sybilline books hardly instilled terror in the plebs, much less cooled tensions. It is clearer from Livy that piety motivated the citizens to put an end to the discord that characterizes the early chapters of the third book and leads to the decemvirate.

Later, when "a citizen grave and of authority ... with words, part loving, part threatening" reveals the extent of the danger of Appius Erdo-nius's capture of the Capitol simultaneous to a threat of enemy attack, the plebs swear an oath of loyalty to the current consul.²⁸ When that consul is killed, the new consul hopes to transfer the force of that obligation to himself in order to check the resurfacing of the Terentillian legislation by taking the plebs to war. Again, the tribunes object, clearly in the interest of the plebs, but the plebs' fear of breaking the oath again prevails over their own self-interest. Machiavelli cites Livy to explain this phenomenon: "nondum haec, quae nunc tenet saeculum, negligentia deum venerat, nec interpretando sibi quisque iusiurandum et leges aptas faciebat" ("[that] negligence of the gods that now possesses the age had not yet come, nor did each make oath and laws suitable by interpreting for himself").²⁹ Because it was clear that the plebs would go to war in spite of the objections of the tribunes, the tribunes compromised in order to save political face; for one year, the tribunes agreed not to introduce the Terentillian law, the consuls not to take the plebs to war.

This compromise, clearly to the advantage of the Senate, would not have been possible without the plebs' overriding sense of obligation. If the plebs of olden times do not interpret obligations according to their interests, it is not immediately clear how we are to take the previous examples of the patricians' interpreting signs, and generally using religion,

²⁷ *Discorsi* 1.13; *Discourses*, 40–41.

²⁸ *Discorsi* 1.13; *Discourses*, 40.

²⁹ *Discorsi* 1.13; *Discourses*, 40.

to advance their own interests over the plebs. Livy's commendation of the past certainly bears more directly on the piety of the plebs than the prudence of the patricians, and Machiavelli has stated that it is a sign of corruption in religion when divine authority speaks "in the mode of the powerful."³⁰ Machiavelli's treatment in 1.13 bids us to ask in what sense any *use* of religion is necessary and not a sign of corruption. The gravity of the political situation, the crisis of the decemvirate, indirectly addresses this question. The immediate sequel takes up the question of necessity directly.

The Use of Religion and Genuine Religiosity

The heading of 1.14 explicitly states that the Romans interpreted the auspices according to necessity, prudently *appearing* to obey the auspices when forced to disobey them, punishing those who despised that obedience. The principle of necessity appears to dictate both that auspices sometimes be ignored and that they always be treated with reverence. The reason Machiavelli takes up the auspices to consider the theme of necessity is indicated, in part, by his previous contention that they are the foundation of the life of the Gentile religion. As such, the Romans observed them strictly before any undertaking. Nevertheless, when reason dictated a thing that ought to be done which the auspices forbade, the Romans obeyed reason, but did not ignore the auspices. In other words, the Romans, or their princes, conformed to an authority higher than the auspices, namely, reason, but because reason is not self-evidently superior to religious authority in every case, those princes do not despise religion on account of reason. The virtue that respects this double obligation to reason and religion is prudence. Machiavelli illustrates this virtue, and its absence, by means of the so-called "chicken-men."

In comparison with the gravity of the political crisis in the third book of Livy, which introduces the question of necessity, the ridiculousness of the chicken-men is all the more apparent, but as a low example of the claims of religion, the vindication of those claims is all the more pronounced. Quoting Livy's Appius Claudius, Machiavelli writes at 3.33: "Eludant nunc licet religiones. Quid enim est, si pulli non pascentur, si ex cavea tardius exierint, si occinuerit avis? Parva sunt haec; sed parva ista non contemnendo,

³⁰ *Discorsi* 1.12; *Discourses*, 37.

maiores nostri maximam hanc rempublicam fecerunt" ("[i]t is permitted for them to make fun of religion. For what difference does it make if the chickens do not feed, if they come out of the cage slowly, if a bird sounds off? These are little things, but by not despising these little things, our ancestors made this republic the greatest").³¹ This vindication is in keeping with the miraculous reversal of the Roman-Samnite conflict in which bad omens for the Romans and the devoted piety of the Samnites appear to forecast the formers' defeat.

To illustrate the prudent observance of auspices, Machiavelli relates the story of Papirius and the chicken-men. The prince of the chicken-men falsifies the auspices so that they will conform to Papirius's plan to attack the Samnites. That lie eventually reaches the consul's ears through his nephew, who was, according to Livy, a young man born before the time of that learning which despises the gods. Papirius insists on his dutifulness and the favorableness of the auspices; adopting the mode of a diviner himself, he predicts that liars will be punished.

However, Machiavelli gives us every reason to believe that the fulfillment of Papirius's prediction owes more to human deliberation than to chance or providence. Papirius commands the prince of the chicken men to the front line, where he will be most vulnerable. In addition, it is said that the chicken-man dies because of a *Roman* spear, a detail not to be found in Livy's account. Nevertheless, Papirius interprets the death as a sign of the favor of the gods and the purification of a corruption that threatened to bring the wrath of the gods down on the entire community. The point of the lesson is stated by Machiavelli as follows: "col sapere bene accomodare i disegni suoi agli auspicii, prese partito di azuffarsi; senza che quello esercito si avvedesse che in alcuna parte quello avesse negletti gli ordini della loro religione" ("by knowing well how to accommodate his plans to the auspices, he took up a policy of fighting without the army's perceiving that he had neglected in any part the orders of the their religion").³² In Livy, the same spiritedness of Papirius that would not permit him to turn back from battle because of disputed auspices also led to a vow to Jupiter Victor which Livy says so pleased the gods that they turned the bad auspices to good.

Appius Pulcher's treatment of the auspices illustrates rash impiety rather than prudence. Although Papirius faces an erosion of confidence

³¹ *Discorsi* 3.33; *Discourses*, 286.

³² *Discorsi* 1.14; *Discourses*, 42.

in his army caused by the revelation that the auspices were unfavorable, he takes the high ground by placing the blame for the corruption on the diviner rather than the auspices themselves. Pulcher, on the other hand, despises the auspices, but in doing so, shows disdain for those who have reverence for divine things as such. Pulcher is imprudent not because he rejects the reasonableness of the auspices, but because he lacks due regard for their effect on those in his charge. He fails to give religion its due. We may surmise that a good leader will defer to authority he may not consider decisive for himself, and will even deploy that authority to bolster his own actions. Earlier, we observed Machiavelli first deferring to the infinite number who believed in Savonarola, then predicting the ruin or scourging of the Roman Church and its princes. Accordingly, one is permitted to conjecture that both the harsh things Machiavelli says about religion and his deferential respect for supernatural things are mutual aspects of his prudence.

The Limits of the Use of Religion

In switching from the Romans to the Samnites in 1.15, Machiavelli continues with the subject matter of the tenth book of Livy, but takes up the cause of Papirius's enemy. Unlike the enemy considered above, the Veientes, who fell to the Romans, in part, because of their impiety, the extreme piety of the Samnites resembles that of the Romans, especially those youths entering the temple of Juno. The Samnites cannot be convicted of a neglect of divine things. We learned above that confidence, or faith, is the reason for a prince's prudential deference to religion. The last discourse on the Samnites, who had final recourse to religion in an attempt to preserve their freedom, discloses the limits of that faith. Less directly, Machiavelli takes up a consideration of the possibility of restoring the original foundation of Christianity, to which he alluded in 1.12.

We saw earlier, in 1.11, two examples of oaths that are secured under the threat of violence. However, the oath that the Samnites used to induce obstinacy in the spirits of the soldiers, has a character different from the Roman examples, one connected to the antiquity of the sacrifice which precedes the oath. The Samnites' extreme remedy appears to be a return to the fierceness and savagery of the past, a recovery of orders comparable to those of Romulus, which rendered the first Romans fierce and formidable military opponents. This conscious invocation of antiquity bears some resemblance to the conservative element we have observed in Livy

and Machiavelli, the sense that the soundness of the past is preferable to the weakness of the present. However, the savagery of the religious rite, which Livy intimates verged on human sacrifice, shows the limits of any pretensions to return to the past. We recall that Numa, the founder of Roman piety, introduced *new* orders in accordance with the providence of the heavens. Papirius's speech to his troops and the outcome of the battle show that, in such conflicts, good arms are superior to a fear of the gods induced by cruel savagery: "la virtù romana, il timore concepito per le passate rotte, superò qualunque ostinazione ei potessero avere presa per virtù della religione e per il giuramento preso" ("Roman virtue and the fear conceived out of past defeats overcame whatever obstinacy [the Samnites] were able to assume by virtue of religion and the oath they had taken").³³

Conclusion

In the beginning of this essay, we took note of the connection for Livy between writing history and religion: his return to the actions of the most prudent men of the ancient past in all their dignity proceeds from a kind of religious sensibility, a deferential regard for the goodness of the oldest things. We saw, in the context of Machiavelli's treatment of events in Livy's fifth book, that Livy also declines to pass judgment on the truth of ancient things.

These two aspects of Livy's relation to Rome's beginning are found together in Livy's own beginning, the *prefatio* to his great work. There Livy states that reports handed down of events before or during the founding of the city have a character more appropriate to poetic fables than uncorrupted records of *res gestae*, for it is the privilege of antiquity to mix human things with the divine in order to render the *primordia* more august. He is not inclined to affirm or refute these reports. This is perfectly in keeping with the modesty with which Livy begins his work: on the question of whether or not he will have employed himself in a way worthy of all the work involved in a complete account of the Roman things from the *primordia* of the city, Livy says that he does not know nor, if he knew, would he dare to say so.

³³ *Discorsi* 1.15; *Discourses*, 43.

This modesty has a bearing even on his characterization of the reports of the earliest things as poetic fables. Livy concludes his preface by saying that querulous thoughts may be necessary concerning the present, but are absent from the beginning of things; rather, if historians were to have the same custom as poets, they would begin first with the auspices, then prayers to the gods for success in so great an enterprise. Livy's beginnings—simple, but portending greatness—are not so different from Rome's.

Machiavelli's own beginning in the *Discourse on Livy*, it is safe to say, has a character of daring rather than modesty, a daring befitting a second Columbus. Furthermore, in the enormity of his enterprise, Machiavelli, unlike Livy, depends on the labor of others after him to complete the task he had begun. "E benché questa impresa sia difficile, nondimeno, aiutato da coloro che mi hanno ad entrare questo peso confortato, credo portarlo in modo che a uno altro resterà breve cammino a condurlo a loco destinato" ("Although this enterprise may be difficult, nonetheless, aided by those who have encouraged me to accept this burden, I believe I can carry it far enough so that a short road will remain for another to bring it to the destined place").³⁴ Nevertheless, a certain hopefulness is common to each author's beginning. What is the basis of this hope? In the case of Livy, that basis is tolerably clear; it is the auspices, the foundation of "the life of the Gentile religion" and an attendant confidence in the providential ascendance of Rome. In the present essay, I have endeavored to show that Machiavelli reveals the basis of hope in his own case by means of a *quaedam religio* at the heart of his appeal to antiquity and by means of a treatment of religion which accords with an apprehension of not only the use of religion, but the grounds for that utility.

³⁴ *Discorsi*, Proemio; *Discourses*, 6.

PART THREE

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

FICINIAN THEORIES AS RHETORICAL DEVICES:
THE CASE OF GIROLAMO SAVONAROLA¹

Lorenza Tromboni

The relationship between Girolamo Savonarola and Marsilio Ficino has long attracted the attention of scholars of late Quattrocento Florence. Although these figures were bound by common cultural objectives for a time, their relations cooled suddenly before the Friar's death. The present study seeks to clarify the dynamics of their relationship and the reasons for their estrangement by offering a fuller account of their exchange than currently exists. While the development of this exchange is of intrinsic interest, it also engages certain intellectual and spiritual ties that developed among other members of the Laurentian circle: while intellectuals such as Giovanni Nesi² and Girolamo Benivieni³ sought to harmonize these two figures by magnifying their philosophical and spiritual continuities, Ficino's often polemical interlocutor, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola,⁴ devoted the last years of his life to religious works, eventually taking

¹ Translated by Maria Coppola (University of Trento, Italy) and Christiana Purdy Moudarres. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of cited texts are the editors'.

² See Cesare Vasoli, "Giovanni Nesi tra Donato Acciaiuoli e Girolamo Savonarola," in *Umanesimo e teologia tra '400 e '500, Memorie domenicane* 4 (1973): 103–179; Gian Carlo Garfagnini, "Neoplatonismo e spiritualismo nella Firenze di fine Quattrocento: Giovanni Nesi," *Annali del Dipartimento di Filosofia. Università degli Studi di Firenze*, n.s. 13 (2007): 59–73. See also *Repertorium fontium historiae mediæ ævi... emendatum et auctum* (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1962–), vol. 8, 172–173.

³ See Cesare Vasoli, "Girolamo Benivieni," in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana 1960–), vol. 8, 550–555.

⁴ See Michael J. B. Allen, "The Second Ficino-Pico Controversy: Parmenidean Poetry, Eristic and the One," in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Florence: Olschki, 1986), vol. 2, 417–455; Vittore Branca, "Tra Ficino 'Orfeo ispirato' e Poliziano 'Ercole ironico'," in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, vol. 2, 459–475; Gian Carlo Garfagnini, "Savonarola tra Giovanni e Giovanfrancesco Pico," in *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: Convegno internazionale di studi nel cinquecentesimo anniversario della morte (1494–1994) Mirandola, 4–8 ottobre 1994*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Florence: Olschki 1997), 237–279; Eugene E. Ryan, "L'influenza degli scritti filosofici di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola sull'interpretazione cinquecentesca dei dialoghi di Platone," in *Giovanni e Giovanfrancesco Pico. L'opera e la fortuna di due studenti ferraresi*, ed. Patrizia Castelli (Florence: Olschki, 1998), 138–155; Maude Vanhaelen, "The Pico-Ficino Controversy: New Evidence in Ficino's Commentary on the Parmenides," in *Rinascimento* 49 (2010): 1–39.

up residence in the Convent of San Marco, where he was buried in the Dominican habit.⁵

As is well known, Ficino was originally a great admirer of Savonarola, particularly in light of the Friar's involvement in the political events of November 1494, which prevented the troops of Charles VIII from plundering Florence.⁶ As M. Vanhaelen has recently argued,⁷ and as earlier proposed by Weinstein,⁸ it was precisely in December of 1494 that Ficino's attitude towards Girolamo took an abrupt turn. Evidence of a change of heart emerges clearly from two letters which Ficino sent to Giovanni Cavalcanti on 12 and 20 December of 1494.⁹ In the first, Ficino conveys his esteem for Savonarola, whom he describes as a prophet, chosen by God for his holiness and wisdom. In the second, written roughly a week later, Ficino refers to a discussion he had had with Cavalcanti and Gherardo Gianfigliuzzi about how to distinguish the friends of God from His enemies. According to Ficino, who defers to the authority of Plato, one who claims to possess divine gifts should bear witness to them through his behavior. Although Savonarola is not singled out, Ficino's admonishment is likely to have been directed against the Friar and the course of his engagement with Florence's political reform.

What may have triggered Marsilio's sudden disenchantment was a sermon Savonarola delivered on 12 December in which he reproached members of the Laurentian circle for lingering "nelle case e conviti degli uomini grandi come loro satelliti e adulatori [...] Non laudano Iddio vero e vivo, ma laudano più presto cose vane, come sono astrologi e poeti e filosofi e altri simili, e hannoli quasi per loro dèi" ("at the homes and banquets of illustrious men, like appendages and flatterers [...] They do not praise the true and living God, but more readily do they praise worldly things, are

⁵ On this episode, see the transcription of the handwritten notes of Friar Roberto Ubaldini da Gagliano on Domenico Benivieni's work, published in Domenico Benivieni, *Trattato in difesa di Girolamo Savonarola*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Florence: Sismel, 2003), 73–75.

⁶ See Roberto Ridolfi, *Vita di Girolamo Savonarola* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1997), 66–74.

⁷ See Maude Vanhaelen, "Ficino and Savonarola on Prophecy: An anti-savonarolan Reading of St Paul's *First Epistle to the Romans* (1497)," in *The Rebirth of the Platonic Theology. Volume in Honour of M. J. B. Allen*, ed. James Hankins and Fabrizio Meroi (Florence: Olschki, forthcoming). I would like to thank the author for his permission to consult this forthcoming article.

⁸ See Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence. Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 185–226.

⁹ Marsilio Ficino, *Opera* (Basileae: per Adamum Henricum Petri, 1576) (Rist. anast. Ivry sur. Seine: Phénix Editions, 2000), 961–964.

they are astrologers and poets and philosophers and similar such types, and they cling to them as if to gods").¹⁰ We can safely assume that Ficino took this reproach personally, and that he thenceforth began to question Savonarola's actual intentions. The significance of the episode for Ficino is reinforced by his remarks in the well-known *Apologia contra Savonarolam* (1498), where he casts the Friar in a decidedly negative light and claims to have taken his distance from him three years prior, that is, in 1495: "sed cito resipivi atque iam toto triennio clam frequentius saepeque palam nec sine discrimine notos mihi multos commonefeci, ut monstrum hoc veneficum longe fugerent in calamitatem huius populi natum" ("but quickly I came to my senses and for three whole years now I have warned many known to me, frequently in private and often publicly, and not without great peril, so that they might flee far away from this poisonous monster, born to be a disaster for this people").¹¹

It is worth noting that there is no correspondence between these events and what Savonarola's earliest biographer, Pseudo-Burlamacchi,¹² tells us about a sermon preached by the Friar in 1496. Between 16 and 25 April of that year, Savonarola is said to have curried favor with the people of Prato while preaching in the Church of San Domenico.¹³ One of these sermons was apparently delivered in the monastery refectory to a group of professors and students of the Studio Pisano, which had been moved temporarily to Prato. Among those present were Marsilio Ficino and Oliviero Arduini, a well-known Florentine philosopher at the time,¹⁴ both of whom were "extraordinarily pleased" by the sermon, the latter inviting his students to follow Savonarola's example. The details of this episode are naturally difficult to reconcile with Ficino's statement regarding the moment when he distanced himself from the Friar—it seems highly unlikely that

¹⁰ Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo con il Trattato sopra il reggimento e governo della città di Firenze*, ed. Luigi Firpo (Rome: Belardetti, 1965), 182.

¹¹ Marsilio Ficino, *Apologia contra Savonarolam*, in *Supplementum Ficinianum*, ed. Paul Oskar Kristeller (Florence: Olschki, 1987), vol. 2, 76–79, 77. The English translation is from *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola: Religion and Politics, 1490–1498*, trans. Anne Borelli and Maria Pastore Passaro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 357.

¹² Pseudo-Burlamacchi, *La vita del beato Ieronimo Savonarola* (Florence: Olschki, 1937). This anonymous biography of Savonarola is dated back to the sixteenth century and was ascribed to Pacifico Burlamacchi. It was published according to the Ginoriano manuscript by Roberto Ridolfi and Piero Ginori Conti.

¹³ As also Landucci notes, people came from Florence and from the countryside to listen to him. See Luca Landucci, *Diario fiorentino dal 1450 al 1516* (Florence: Sansoni, 1883), 129.

¹⁴ See Ridolfi, *Vita di Girolamo Savonarola*, 133; pseudo-Burlamacchi, *La vita del beato Ieronimo Savonarola*, 86 ff.

Marsilio would have continued to attend Savonarola's sermons after his indirect reproach only a few months earlier, much less that he would have traveled to Prato to do so.

In any case, the opposition between the two intensified in the years that followed. The diversity of their views on certain philosophical and theological issues became sufficiently pronounced for Savonarola to take clear and explicit aim against Ficino on the subjects of poetry (*Apologeticus de ratione poeticae artis*, 1491), prophecy (*Compendio di rivelazioni*, 1495), astrology (*Trattato contra li astrologi*, 1497), and, more generally, the proper relationship between philosophy and theology.¹⁵ Ficino's *Apologia contra Savonarolam* marked the apex of this controversy. In this work, which Ficino addressed to the College of Cardinals, Savonarola is demonized in no uncertain terms: "At vero non mortalis homo, sed callidissimus demon, non demon unus, sed demonica turba mortales heu miseros per occultissimas insidias invasit mirisque machinis circumvenit" ("But truly no mortal man, but the most crafty demon, and not a single demon, but a demonic horde, has assaulted (alas!) miserable mortals through the most occult snares and duped them by means of astonishing machinations").¹⁶

As Weinstein has pointed out, Ficino resorts in the *Apologia* to some of the trademarks of Savonarolian rhetoric, such as the insistence upon angelic and demonic forces at work in the world, the immanence of the the Anti-Christ's arrival, and the inestimable value of the prophet as mediator between the human and the divine.¹⁷ Indeed, Savonarola's sermons contain innumerable warnings against false prophets,¹⁸ whom the

¹⁵ On this theme, which emerges in all of Savonarola's works, see Gian Carlo Garfagnini, "La polemica antiastrologica del Savonarola ed i suoi precedenti tomistici," e "Letteratura e letterati negli scritti di Girolamo Savonarola," in Garfagnini, *Questa è la terra tua» Savonarola a Firenze* (Florence: Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2000), 149–172 and 405–417; Cesare Vasoli, "Savonarola e la cultura filosofica fiorentina," in *Studi savonaroliani. Verso il V centenario*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Florence: Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 1996), 107–126. See also Lorenza Tromboni, "Il 'De doctrina Platoniorum': note per un platonismo savonaroliano," in *Universality of Reason—Plurality of Philosophies in the Middle Ages, Acts of the XIIth International Congress of Medieval Philosophy, SIEPM, Palermo 16–22 September 2007* (Palermo: Officina di Studi Medievali, forthcoming).

¹⁶ Marsilio Ficino, *Apologia contra Savonarolam*, 76. *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola*, 355.

¹⁷ Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence*, 185–226.

¹⁸ This theme is present in all the sermons of the Ezekiel cycle (27 November 1496–27 March 1497). Cf. Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, 69 and *Trattato contra li astrologi*, in Savonarola, *Scritti filosofici I*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini and Eugenio Garin (Rome: Belardetti, 1982), 279 and following; Savonarola, *Prediche sopra i salmi*, ed. Vincenzo Romano (Rome: Belardetti, 1974), vol. 1, 162–166.

Friar describes as wolves in sheep's clothing, traitors of the people, and devotees of vice and corruption. Through his frequent references to Matthew 7:15 ("Attendite a falsis prophetis, qui veniunt ad vos in vestimentis ovium, intrinsecus autem sunt lupi rapaces, a fructibus eorum cognoscetis eos" ["Beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. By their fruits you shall know them"]),¹⁹ Savonarola underscores the affinity between the wolf and the false prophet, a comparison he develops further in one of his *Prediche sopra i Salmi*:²⁰ just as the wolf threatens the safety of a flock of sheep, so the charlatan threatens the consciences of men; just as the wolf ravages his prey, so vice ravages virtue and the capacity to live justly. Armed with Sacred Scripture, the preacher is the good shepherd who banishes the wolf with his staff to protect his flock. Savonarola's followers are especially warned against "lupi che hanno indosso la veste del pastore" ("wolves who put on the clothing of shepherds"): they disguise themselves as priests, friars, and family men; they pretend to behave virtuously, but they hate all simple and pure things; they contrive to turn the faithful from their prayers: "Ma che dirai tu di quelli che sono lupi e hanno indosso la veste del pastore? Cioè vestiti da frati o da preti o padri di famiglia [...] e sono poi lupi? Io te gli darò a conoscere acciò che tu ti guardi da loro" ("But what will you say of those who are wolves and put on the clothing of shepherds? Those who dress up as friars or priests or family men and yet are wolves within? I shall tell you how to recognize them so that you may protect yourselves").²¹ It is precisely the passage from Matthew's Gospel cited above that Ficino will use to underscore the Friar's duplicity, his wickedness, and his betrayal of the Florentine people:

Nam qui a seductoribus fascinati falso temere conserunt, non solum veritatis lumine semel orbatī sunt et ad veritatem recipiendam diffidentiores accedunt. Admonendi vero sunt quicumque declamatores sacros saepeque execrabiles vel fanaticos audiunt, ut Evangelicum illud semper ante mentis oculos et aures habeant [Mt 7:15]: Attendite a falsis prophetis...²²

¹⁹ Cf. Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Ezechiele*, ed. Roberto Ridolfi (Rome: Belardetti, 1955), vol. 1, 64, 283; vol. 2, 108; idem, *De veritate prophetica dialoqus*, ed. Claudio Leonardi, trans. Oddo Bucci (Florence: Sismel Edizioni del Galluzzo, 1997), 310.

²⁰ The sermon is dated 3 May, 1495. See Savonarola, *Prediche sopra i salmi*, vol. 1, 162–166.

²¹ Ibid., 164.

²² See Kristeller, ed., *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 78. "For those who are bewitched by such seducers and heedlessly cling to what is false are not only deprived of the light of truth once and for all; they also become more diffident about receiving the truth. But

This significantly overarching theme reflects the pervasiveness of the cultural background which Ficino and Savonarola shared, notwithstanding the diversity of their respective aims. In his recent volume, Amos Edelheit has thoroughly analyzed the “spiritual crisis” of the last decades of the fifteenth century in order to explain the genesis and peculiarity of “humanist theology.”²³ The crisis of which he speaks, the outgrowth of the political, intellectual, and social conditions of fifteenth-century Italy, yielded various attempts at resolution, as evidenced by the figures in question. While Ficino sought to revitalize Christianity by means of ancient philosophy, an enterprise on which he embarked through the translation and diffusion of classical texts, Savonarola proposed to re-establish Christian values by means of a return to Sacred Scripture, the basis of the *semplicità della vita christiana*, which he perceived as inextricably intertwined with political and social reform. It was not only an allegiance to philosophy or to Scripture that distinguished these men’s conceptions of spiritual renewal. Unlike Ficino, whose approach to reform evolved over time, Savonarola remained faithful to his plan to redeem Florence by spreading the revealed word. Preaching is the means by which the prophet communicates his message to his followers; the Bible is the basis of his authority. And yet for all the warnings he issues to his followers against the corruption of religion by philosophy,²⁴ philosophical concepts figure prominently in his work.

This study presents the initial findings of my research on Savonarola’s philosophical sources and his connection with certain members of the Laurentian circle in Florence. Evidence of the Friar’s interest in classical thought emerges clearly in two compendia: one is dedicated to Aristotelian philosophy, and reflects his intellectual training;²⁵ the other, of greater interest, is a compendium of Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy, entitled *De doctrina Platoniorum*, in which Savonarola summarized

all who listen to the sacred and often accursed preachers, or rather fanatics, should be warned to have always before the eyes and ears of the mind those words of the Evangelist [Mt 7:15]: Beware of false prophets. . .”

²³ Amos Edelheit, *Ficino, Pico and Savonarola. The Evolution of the Humanistic Theology, 1461/2–1498* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008).

²⁴ See, for instance, Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Ezechiele*, vol. 2, 21, 25, 40, 56, 58, 313, 319; *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, 66, 194, 205, 289, 365, 389, 392, 393, 420–1; *Prediche sopra i Salmi*, vol. 1, 265.

²⁵ Preserved in ms. Florence, BNCF, Conv. soppr. D. 8.985ff. 190r–205r. I am currently working on the critical edition of this compendium.

and transcribed sections of the Platonic dialogues and of the *Commento sopra una canzona de amore composta da Girolamo Benivieni* by Pico della Mirandola.²⁶ What appears at first sight to be a mere compilation²⁷ gains interest upon closer inspection, for Savonarola's transcriptions and summaries are based on Ficino's translation of Plato's works (first edition, 1484), which included his *Commentarium in Convivium* (1468).²⁸

Of particular interest is the way in which this compendium was used, since Savonarola incorporated the summarized and recorded texts into his sermons for didactic and rhetorical purposes. A case in point are his *Prediche sopra Ezechiele*, the sermons on Ezekiel preached between 27 November 1496 and 27 March 1497. In 1497, during Lent, after having briefly summarized the previous day's sermon, Savonarola turns to the question of man's ignorance in the face of divine providence and his desire for wisdom:

quanto più l'uomo vede che sono molte cose che non sa, tanto più si annichila e dice:—io non sono nulla—; e *ideo* tanto quanto uno è più savio si reputa più pazzo e quanto uno è più pazzo tanto si reputa più savio, perchè gli pare sapere ogni cosa e non sa nulla.²⁹

To further illustrate this point, according to which the man who considers himself wise on account of his acquired knowledge is, in fact, mad, Savonarola presents a striking example:

Io mi ricordo aver detto che quando Socrate fu menato preso dalli Ateniesi, disse prima: Lasciatemi dire la causa della mia persecuzione, che è la invidia. Fu uno che andò a quelli oraculi delli demonii e dimandò qual fussi el più savio uomo e se Socrate era el più savio uomo del mondo. Rispose lo oracolo e disse: Nessuno è più savio. [...] Socrate aveva un grande ingegno

²⁶ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Commento dello illustrissimo signor conte Joanni Pico Mirandolano sopra una canzona de amore composta da Girolamo Benivieni cittadino fiorentino secondo la mente et opinione de' Platonici*, in G. Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scritti vari*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Florence: Vallecchi, 1942), 443–581.

²⁷ Edited in Lorenza Tromboni, "Girolamo Savonarola lettore di Platone: edizione e commento del 'De doctrina Platoniorum'," *Rinascimento* 46 (2006): 133–213.

²⁸ Marsilio Ficino, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon, de l'amour*, ed. trans., Pierre Laurens (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2002).

²⁹ See Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Ezechiele*, vol. 1, 220. "The more a man sees that many are the things he does not know, the more he humbles himself and says, 'I am nothing'; and thus the wiser he is, the more foolish he considers himself and the more foolish a man is, the wiser he considers himself, for it seems to him that he knows everything when he in fact knows nothing."

e sempre, come uno diceva una cosa, lui contradiceva, e però suscitò contra sè l'invidia e la persecuzione.³⁰

This vignette is extracted verbatim from *De doctrina Platoniorum*, where the Friar had glossed this particular passage of the *Apologia*, transcribed according to the Ficinian translation.³¹ Savonarola's annotations in the latter context are remarkably extensive, covering the most significant moments of the trial of Socrates, the reasons for his condemnation, his ability to distinguish true wisdom from acquired knowledge, and to recognize the presumption of so-called "wise men." Only he who considers himself "pazzo" and not "savio" is aware of his ignorance and of his proper relationship to the Creator. Thus, God, he continues, seeing this inversion of values, sent Christ into the world, "e con la croce, cosa stoltissima, ha messo nel mondo la sua sapienza" ("and with the cross, the basest matter, brought His wisdom into the world").³² The purpose of this particular reference is twofold. On the one hand, it invites his listeners to practice humility and to renounce the transience of worldly knowledge—"Item, colui che si reputa grave è leggeri, perché vuole dimonstrare di sapere: sarà uno che saprà un poco di grammatica e vuole disputare di filosofia, va presuntuosamente e laudasi, e però è pazzo" ("Item, he who considers himself deep is shallow, for he wants to show off his wisdom: he probably knows a little bit of grammar and thinks he can philosophize; he acts presumptuously and praises himself and therefore he is a fool").³³ On the other, it explains the difficulty faced by any prophet in addressing his people: like Socrates and, implicitly, like Savonarola, Ezekiel was considered mad and mocked; his words went unheeded. The prophet's madness, however, is true wisdom, the means by which God measures the obedience of men: "Iddio fa queste cose per fare stare li uomini in umilità e per confondere la sapienza umana e per provare la obbedienza" ("God acts in this way in order to humble man and to confound human wisdom and to test man's obedience").³⁴ It is not unusual for Savonarola to appeal to

³⁰ Ibid., 220–221. "I remember having said that when Socrates was imprisoned by the Athenians, he first said: Let me tell you the cause of my persecution, which is envy. There was one who went to those oracles of demons and asked who was the wisest man and if Socrates was the wisest man in the world. The oracles answered, saying: No one is wiser. [...] Socrates had a great mind and, whenever anyone said something, he would always contradict them, and hence he elicited envy and persecution."

³¹ See Tromboni, "Girolamo Savonarola lettore di Platone," 191–192.

³² See Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Ezechiele*, vol. 1, 221.

³³ Ibid., 220.

³⁴ Ibid., 222.

non-biblical and patristic sources in his sermons. What distinguishes this particular *exemplum* is its fuller treatment in the *De doctrina Platonico-rum*, which reflects its Ficinian origins. Given Savonarola's transcription of Ficino's own summary of his *Commentarium in Convivium* in the *editio princeps*, the Friar was attentive not only to Plato's work, but to Ficino's particular interpretation of it.

The source of the Friar's apparent interest in Ficino is by no means self-evident. We should remember that Savonarola's attitude toward philosophy is always cautious. However frequently he defers to philosophical authority, he never fails to warn his congregation of its dangers. In *De honesta disciplina*, for example, Pietro Crinito reports of a conversation among Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Savonarola, and a certain *Laurentianus*, held some time before Pico's death on 17 November 1494, about the relationship between Christianity and ancient philosophy—specifically, regarding their conceptions of God and of the immortality of the soul. Savonarola warns his interlocutors of the dangers philosophy presents to Christians, in particular, that of Plato and Aristotle:

Cave . . . Laurentiane, ne verba pro rebus accipias. Nam qui veteres philosophos in academiam pertrahuntur perfacile quidem vel falluntur ipsi, vel alios fallunt. *Plato enim ad animi insolentiam, Aristoteles vero ad impietatem instruit.* Quo magis te . . . hortamur, ut ab ipsis philosophie spatiis atque umbraculis ad Salomonis potius porticum deficias, in qua certissima vitae ratio atque veritas continentur.³⁵

Whatever its historical accuracy, the reported exchange is indicative of the Friar's stance with respect to the two great philosophers of antiquity: the year in question, 1494, marks the beginning of Savonarola's greatest cycles of sermons, from the earliest, on Aggeus, to the latest, on Exodus, in which he sharpens his attack on the cultural and political landscape of his adoptive city. His concern with the relationship between Christianity and pagan culture throughout these sermons goes hand in hand with his

³⁵ Pietro Crinito, *De honesta disciplina*, ed. Carlo Angeleri (Rome: Bocca, 1955), 104–105. “Take care, Laurentianus, that you do not accept words in place of things. For those who drag ancient philosophers into the Academy are very easily deceived themselves, or deceive others. Plato's teaching leads to pride of soul, and Aristotle's to impiety. With good reason then, I urge you, Laurentianus, to desert the paths and groves of philosophy for the porch of Solomon, where are to be found the most sure way of life and truth.” The English translation is taken from Daniel P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972), 48 (italics mine). See also Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus*, 80.

insistence on the need to restore Scripture to the core of Christian living. Permission to turn from a uniquely biblical-patristic path in the direction of philosophy is granted only to those who are fully aware of the risks this turn entails.

Savonarola's caveat is crucial for interpreting those traces of Ficino that can be found throughout his works, be they explicit, as in the case of *De doctrina Platoniorum*, or oblique, as in the examples to which we now turn. We can classify the latter into three distinct categories. The first is comprised of similes and *exempla* intended to ease the listeners' comprehension of abstract theological concepts.³⁶ These are often derived from the humoral theory to which Ficino dedicated his *De vita*, a medical-philosophical work published in Florence in 1489, which immediately enjoyed a wide circulation,³⁷ and elaborate on the traditional association between sin and disease.

The second category of examples is indebted to Ficino's theory of love, developed in his *Commentarium in Convivium*. At this point, it will be helpful to draw a distinction between two types of references—on the one hand, direct citations of the *Commentarium* that can be found in *De doctrina Platoniorum* and were subsequently used for preaching; on the other, allusions that reverberate, for example, in Savonarola's references to the union between the lover and the beloved.

³⁶ I pass over the technical aspects of the use of *exempla* and *similitudines*. Savonarola uses philosophical examples in a very specific way. The didactic function of his moral examples distinguishes his preaching from that of Bernardino da Siena and Giordano da Pisa. I would like to thank Professor Delcorno for helping me with this aspect of my research. See *Les exempla médiévaux. Introduction à la recherche suivie des tables critiques de l'Index exemplorum* de F. C. Tubach, ed. Anne Marie Polo de Beaulieu and Jacques Berlioz (Carcassonne: GARAE/Hésiode, 1992); *Les exempla médiévaux: Nouvelles perspectives*, ed. Anne Marie Polo de Beaulieu and Jacques Berlioz (Paris: Champion, 1998); Claude Bremond, Jacques Le Goff and Jean-Claude Schmitt, *L' "exemplum"* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996); Carlo Delcorno, "L' 'Exemplum' nella predicazione medievale in volgare," in *Concetto, storia, miti e immagini del Medio Evo*, ed. Vittore Branca (Florence: Sansoni, 1973), 393–408; Delcorno, *Exemplum e letteratura: tra Medioevo e Rinascimento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989).

³⁷ See in particular Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, ed. and trans. Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1989); Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Il pensiero filosofico di Marsilio Ficino* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1988); Brian P. Copenhaver, "Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic in 'De vita' of Marsilio Ficino," *Renaissance Quarterly* 37 (1984): 523–554; Cesare Vasoli, *Un "medico" per i "sapienti": Ficino e i Libri De Vita*, in Vasoli, *Tra "maestri" umanisti e teologi* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1991). See also Brian P. Copenhaver, Carol V. Kaske, and Daniel P. Walker in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Studi e documenti*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Florence: Olschki, 1986).

The third category of examples encompasses those passages in which Savonarola condemns astrology and magic. The target of his attacks is often Ficino himself, particularly the third volume of his *De vita*, the *De vita coelitus comparanda*, in which he describes the ways in which astrological knowledge can be used to create *imagines*—amulets in which the powers of the planets can be channelled.

A basic premise of medieval preaching, most influentially articulated by Augustine in *De doctrina christiana*,³⁸ is that a sermon's form and content should conform to the audience to which it is addressed. One of the most popular preaching manuals of the thirteenth century, the *De eruditione praedicatorum* by Humbert of Romans, taught preachers how to simplify the doctrines they learned in the *studia generalia* in order to effectively transmit their contents to the unlettered.³⁹ By employing *similitudines*, *exempla*, and biblical and patristic *auctoritates*, Humbert provided his preachers with the necessary instruments for popularizing the most difficult and abstract aspects of Christian doctrine, often by drawing on the experiences of daily life.⁴⁰ In the fourteenth-century *Tractatus solennis de arte et vero modo predicandi*, initially misattributed to Thomas Aquinas,⁴¹ we find a description of the practice of *dilatatio*, the discussion of topics either directly or indirectly related to a given passage from Scripture in order to simplify its message. Key elements of the *dilatatio* included the introduction of biblical and patristic *auctoritates*, *ex ratio* arguments, and *exempla*. As early as the twelfth century, theory was apparently being put into practice by the preachers to whom Alain de Lille addressed his *Ars praedicandi*, whose audiences were larger and

³⁸ See Carlo Delcorno, *La predicazione nell'età comunale* (Florence: Sansoni, 1974), 2–3, consulted electronically at <http://www.storia.unive.it/RM/didattica/strumenti/delcorno/indice.htm>.

³⁹ Edited in *B. Humberti de Romanis Opera*, ed. Johachim J. Berthier (Rome: Marietti, 1956), vol. 2, 173–484. See in particular Laura Gaffuri, “La prédication en Italie (XII^e–XV^e siècle),” in *Cultures italiennes (XII^e–XV^e siècle)*, ed. Isabelle Heullant-Donat (Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 2000), 193–237; Claude Carozzi, “Humbert de Romans et la prédication,” in *L'ordre des Prêcheurs et son histoire en France méridionale*, ed. Jean-Louis Biget (Toulouse: Privat, 2001), 249–61.

⁴⁰ See Carlo Delcorno, *Giordano da Pisa e l'antica predicazione volgare* (Florence: Olschki, 1975), 29–36.

⁴¹ See Hain *1356, Harry Caplan, *Medieval Artes Praedicandi, a Handlist* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1934), n. 27; Thomas M. Charland, *Artes praedicandi. Contribution à l'histoire de la rhétorique au Moyen Âge* (Paris-Ottawa: Institut d'études médiévales, 1936), 85–88. The English translation is taken from Harry Caplan, “A Late Medieval Tractate on Preaching,” in *Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking in Honor of J.A. Winans* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1925), 61–91.

more diverse than those that of the monastic schools.⁴² In the *Summa de arte praedicandi*, dated 1227/8, Thomas of Chobham defined the practice of preaching in six points, which he called the *topos* of *circumstantiae*: *quid sit praedicatio* (what preaching is), *quot sunt species predicationum* (how many types of preaching there are), *quis debeat predicare* (who should preach), *quid sit predicandum* (what should be preached), *quibus sit predicandum* (to whom one should preach), *de quibus* (about whom).⁴³ The fifth point, *quibus sit praedicandum*, was of particular interest to later authors and gave rise to the so-called *sermones ad status*, sermons directed toward specific categories of people.⁴⁴

As Joseph Ziegler has shown,⁴⁵ the presence of medical *exempla*, arguments, and *auctoritates* in religious contexts grew significantly over the course of the thirteenth century. In his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, for example, Albert the Great makes ample use of his scientific knowledge to account for natural phenomena such as paralysis, fever, and hemorrhages, explicitly citing Galen.⁴⁶ Some of the preaching manuals studied by Ziegler reveal such a reliance on medical material as to suggest that medicine had become part and parcel of late medieval religious discourse. According to Servasanto of Faenza (*Liber de exemplis naturalibus*, *Antidotarium animarum sive Summa de poenitentia*),⁴⁷ Giovanni of

⁴² PL 210, cols. 109–198. Cf. Marie Thérèse d'Alverny, *Alain de Lille. Textes inédits, avec une introduction sur sa vie et ses oeuvres* (Paris: Vrin, 1965), 109–119; Alberto Bartola, "La tecnica della predicazione in due sermoni di Alano di Lilla," *Studi medievali* 27 (1986): 609–623.

⁴³ Thomas de Chobham, *Summa de arte praedicandi*, ed. Franco Morenzoni (Turnhout: Brepols, 1988). See also Richard Sharpe, *A Handlist of the Latin Writers of Great Britain and Ireland before 1540* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 649; Edwin D. Craun, "It's a freletee of flesh": Excuses for Sin, Pastoral Rhetoric, and Moral Agency," in *In the Garden of Evil. The Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard G. Newhauser (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005), 184–185.

⁴⁴ See Carlo Delcorno, "Medieval Preaching in Italy (1200–1500)," in Beverly M. Kienzle, *The Sermon* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 449–560.

⁴⁵ Joseph Ziegler, *Medicine and Religion c. 1330: The Case of Arnau de Vilanova* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

⁴⁶ Albertus Magnus, *Super Mattheum*, in *Opera omnia* 21/1, ed. Bernhard Schmidt (Münster: Aschendorff, 1987).

⁴⁷ Servasanto da Faenza, *Liber aureus qui antidotarium animarum dictus est* (Lovanii, 1485). The indexes of the *Summa* are edited by Carla Casagrande, "Predicare la penitenza. La Summa de poenitentia di Servasanto da Faenza," in *Dalla penitenza all'ascolto delle confessioni: il ruolo dei frati mendicanti. Atti del XXIII Convegno Internazionale della Società internazionale di Studi Francescani e del Centro interuniversitario di studi francescani. Assisi, 12–14 ottobre 1995* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 1996), 69–71; the *Liber de exemplis* is preserved in ms. Paris, BN, lat. 3436, and Wien, ONB, 1589. For a complete list, see Martin Grabmann, "Der 'Liber de exemplis naturalibus' des Franziskaner-

San Gimignano (*Summa de exemplis*),⁴⁸ and Pierre Bersuire (*Reductorium morale*),⁴⁹ writing between the beginning and the second half of the fourteenth century, similes of a medical nature were particularly useful for explaining abstract religious concepts because they invoked the most tangible of human experiences.⁵⁰ Thus, Giovanni refers to the effects wrought by the change of the seasons to describe the four stages through which the soul must pass (*status anime*) to reach perfection; in the *Antidotarium animarum*, Servasanto draws a less conventional parallel between the four seasons and the four ages of man, citing Avicenna as his *auctoritas*; both represent the priest as a spiritual doctor, capable of healing the sick soul through a careful analysis of its symptoms. Among these three manuals, Pierre Bersuire's *Reductorium morale* features the widest array of medical references, which he organizes thematically. He accounts for this strategic integration of medicine and religion by explaining that since all human beings should benefit from the observation of nature and the unveiling of its meanings, the related fields of science and medicine are natural means of moral and religious communication.

The theme of medicine is also central to the preaching of Giordano da Pisa (1260–1311), author of the first collection of sermons in the Italian vernacular⁵¹ and lector at the Convent of Santa Maria Novella since 1302. Giordano remained uniquely devoted to preaching throughout his life, addressing mainly merchants, bankers, businessmen, and members of

theologian Servasanthus," *Franziskanische Studien* 7 (1920): 83–85. Cf. *Repertorium fontium historiae medii aevi*, 10/3343–344.

⁴⁸ Giovanni da San Gimignano, *Summa de exemplis et rerum similitudinibus*, Daventriae 1477 (Copingher 2649). See *Repertorium fontium historiae medii aevi*, vol. 6, 406–407.

⁴⁹ Petrus Berchorius, *Reductorium morale super totam Bibliam* (Argentorati, 1474), Hain *2795. Cf. *Repertorium fontium historiae medii aevi*, 9/1–2, 228–230.

⁵⁰ See Ziegler, *Medicine and Religion* c. 1330, chapters 3 and 4.

⁵¹ See Delcorno, *Giordano da Pisa e l'antica predicazione volgare*; Delcorno, "Esegesi biblica e predicazione di Giordano da Pisa," in *La sorgente e il rovetto: la Bibbia per il XXI secolo tra storia religiosa e scrittura letterari*, ed. Samuele Giombi (Rome: Vecchiarelli 2000); Delcorno, "Giordano da Pisa e la tecnica del sermone medievale," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 151 (1974): 1–36; Delcorno, "Società e pubblico nelle prediche di Giordano da Pisa," *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 10 (1974): 251–304; Lina Bolzoni, "Predicazione in volgare e uso delle immagini, da Giordano da Pisa a San Bernardino da Siena," in *Letteratura in forma di sermone. I rapporti tra predicazione e letteratura nei secoli XIII–XVI. Atti del seminario di studi (Bologna 15–17 novembre 2001)*, ed. Ginetta Auzzas, Giovanni Baffetti and Carlo Delcorno (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 2003), 29–52. On the use of the *exemplum*, see Delcorno, "L'exemplum nella predicazione volgare di Giordano da Pisa," *Atti dell'Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti. Classe di scienze morali, lettere ed arti. Memorie* 36 (1972): 3–121. On the use of medical doctrines, see Cecilia Ianella, "Malattia e salute nella predicazione di Giordano da Pisa," *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 31 (1995): 177–216; idem, *Giordano da Pisa. Etica urbana e forme della società* (Pisa: ETS, 1999).

the Florentine guilds, and his sermons reflect his extraordinary erudition. Thomistic doctrine and patristic writings are integrated with the literature of classical antiquity; astronomical, mathematical, and medical concepts are interwoven with artistic and literary lore. Preaching primarily to lay groups within religious confraternities, Giordano tailors his sermons and his religious message to the values of his listeners. As we might expect, medicine plays an important role in this regard: comparisons of disease to sin, of treatment to redemption, are among the medically infused strands that run throughout his sermons. At the same time, he refers frequently to the business of everyday life, drawing freely on the encyclopedic literature of his age. According to the most important Italian scholar of Giordano's work, the preacher deserves to be considered the founder of the vernacular *novellectica sacra*, and his corpus, an invaluable fresco of Florentine life in the first decade of the fourteenth century.⁵²

The same could doubtless be said of Savonarola's preaching. In the depiction of the late Quattrocento Florentine life that emerges from his sermons, we perceive not only the political and social malaise that plagued the city, but the diffusion of literary, philosophical, and scientific learning outside the confines of the Platonic Academy. Simple and sometimes colorful examples are provided to facilitate the understanding of abstract concepts. A case in point is the sermon Savonarola delivered on 9 February to show how animals—including men—are impelled to act by the objects of their desires. A cat, he tells his listeners, seeing a fish, is impelled to catch it, perceiving it as a *bonum appetibile*, but if the cat is then punished for its action, it will understand that that *bonum* is such only from a limited point of view, and should ultimately be avoided:

Togli la gatta, mostragli il pesce: *ipsa etiam agitur* e è mossa e quasi impulsata dallo istinto naturale, *idest* dallo appetito. Ma la donna mi farà questa obiezione: che dandogli delle busse, la sta e non toglie il pesce; egli è perchè quella cosa non se li appresenta allora buona con quelle busse.⁵³

As far as the theme of medicine is concerned, Savonarola follows the lead of his precursors, making use of metaphors and similes drawn from the medical world in general but also, more specifically, from particular doc-

⁵² See Delcorno, *La predicazione nell'età comunale*, 40. Consulted electronically at http://www.storia.unive.it/_RM/didattica/strumenti/delcorno/saggi/cap14.htm.

⁵³ See Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Ezechiele*, vol. 1, 145. "Take a cat, show her a fish: *ipsa etiam agitur* and she is moved and almost compelled by her natural instinct, *idest* by her appetite. But a woman will object: if you give her a swat, she'll stay still and leave the fish alone; that's because the fish looks less appealing after a good beating."

trines, such as the humoral theory.⁵⁴ As we shall see, this is true not only of his sermons, but also of the *Compendium philosophiae naturalis* and the *Compendium philosophiae moralis*, which he wrote for the instruction of the Friars of San Marco.

The first example dates back to a Lenten sermon from 1498, in which the Friar comments on the beginning of the fourth chapter of Exodus, *Respondens Moyses ait: non credent mihi neque audient vocem meam*. Moses knows that, among his people, some will not believe his words unless they witness a miracle. Similarly, the people of Florence expect a miracle to confirm that Savonarola is, in fact, a prophet, and that all his prophecies will be fulfilled. At this point, Savonarola introduces the example of an herbal remedy: if one takes a purgative made of rhubarb and other herbs, and wishes to know which of these components has the power to purge cholera, or yellow bile, he will need to test them individually, until it becomes clear that only rhubarb produces the desired effect:

Piglia una medicina composta di manna, scamonea e reubarbero, le quali tre cose l'una purga la flegma, l'altra la maninconia, l'altra la còlera; se tu vuoi sapere quale di queste tre cose purghi la colera, pruovale ad una ad una, e se tu vedi che tolto via l'altre due cose, che il reubarbero solo purghi la còlera, e quelle altre due cose, tolte per sè, non la purghino, non dirai tu che el reubarbero solo sia quello che purghi la còlera? Certamente sì.⁵⁵

Similarly, the figure of the prophet is like a remedy prescribed by God to produce a particular effect, namely, redemption. The miracle the Florentines are waiting for is already before them, for they have already experienced redemption and deliverance from sin by means of the prophet sent by God. Just as rhubarb purges cholera, so Savonarola's presence is guiding the people of Florence back on the straight and narrow path.

Savonarola's peculiar example of a purgative and its active ingredient may well have been inspired by Ficino's *De vita*—particularly from its first book, *De vita sana*, which contains a number of remedies for the typical

⁵⁴ On this topic, see Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art* (Nendeln: Klaus Reprint, 1979).

⁵⁵ See Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra l'Esodo*, ed. Pier Giorgio Ricci (Rome: Belardetti, 1955–1956), vol. 1, 310. "Take a medicine composed of manna, scammony, and rhubarb, each of which, taken alone, is supposed to purge phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. If you want to know which of these three ingredients purges yellow bile, try them one by one; if you see that when the other two are taken away, rhubarb alone purges yellow bile, and the other two, taken alone, do not, wouldn't you agree that only rhubarb purges yellow bile? Of course you would."

ailments of intellectuals. First and foremost among the various remedies he recommends to counteract an excess of pituita, or phlegm, are, in fact, rhubarb pills: "Si una cum pituita ceteri quoque humores turbent, pilulis ex reubarbaro Mesues, vel pilulis quae Sine quibus a posterioribus nuncupantur, opportune purgabimus" ("If along with phlegm all the other humors are acting up, it will be fitting to purge them with the rhubarb-pills of Mesue, or with those pills which are called by moderns 'Sine quibus'").⁵⁶ While Ficino prescribes a treatment for excess phlegm, and Savonarola speaks of yellow bile, which were, in fact, two distinct humors, the thrust of the Friar's appeal to the Galenic doctrine is to underscore the purgative power of rhubarb identified by Ficino. Savonarola's further analysis of the remedy's constituents in the context of his sermon naturally illustrates the centrality of his role in restoring health to the city of Florence.

The second example is taken from the *Compendium philosophiae naturalis*, one of the texts Savonarola wrote for teaching after his election as Prior of San Marco. Book 15 focuses on the faculties of the intellective soul: having briefly summarized the powers of the soul, he moves on to a discussion of the passions, which concludes with a detailed excursus on wrath. Here we read that man is naturally inclined towards this particular passion, even more than towards concupiscence, because its causal humor, yellow bile, moves more quickly than the others. In some men, however, it moves more quickly than in others:

Ex complexione tamen individui, ira videtur esse naturalior, quia colera, quae igni assimilatur, citius movetur quam ceteri humores, unde quidam irati vocantur *acuti*, quia cito irascuntur; quidam *amari*, quia retinent diu iram; quidam *difficiles*, quia numquam quiescunt nisi puniant.⁵⁷

Savonarola clarifies further that while some wrathful men are also referred to as *acuti*, since they easily fall prey to wrath, others are called *amari*, since they withhold their wrath at length, and others still are known as *difficiles*, since they can only be calmed through violence.

⁵⁶ See Marsilio Ficino, *De vita libri III*, 1.13. The English translation is taken from Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, 141.

⁵⁷ See Girolamo Savonarola, *Compendium philosophiae naturalis*, in Savonarola, *Scritti filosofici*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini and Eugenio Garin (Rome: Belardetti, 1988), vol. 2, 300 (italics mine). "Nevertheless from the individual complexion, wrath seems to be more natural, since yellow bile, which is similar to fire, is moved more quickly than the other humors, whence certain wrathful people are called *acuti* (tense), since they are quickly angered; others *amari* (bitter), since they retain their wrath for a prolonged period; others *difficili* (intractable), since they can never be calmed except through violence."

It should be noted that Savonarola's purpose in this case is not rhetorical. He refers to the medical doctrine of the humors simply to describe how the effects of wrath are linked to the body's humors. *Còlera* is the Greek name for yellow bile, which is characterized by warmth and dryness and is assimilated to fire; its excess, with which Savonarola is concerned here, is the cause of a hot-tempered disposition and consequently, an inclination towards wrath. This association of a particular humor, disposition, and quality was fundamental to the humoral doctrine on which Ficino elaborates his theory of the intellectual temperament—namely, *melancholia*, so-called for the excess of black bile that was believed to induce it:

Ut autem litterati sint melancholici [...] Naturalis autem causa esse videtur, quod ad scientias praesertim difficiles consequendas necesse est animum ab externis ad interna tanquam a circumferentia quadam ad centrum sese recipere, atque dum speculatur in ipso (ut ita dixerim) hominis centro stabilissime permanere. Ad centrum vero a circumferentia se colligere figique in centro maxime terrae ipsius est proprium, cui quidem atra bilis persimilis est. Igitur atra bilis animum, ut se et colligat in unum et sistat in uno contempleturque, assidue provocat [...] calor quoque plurimum solet extinguui, unde natura cerebri sicca frigidaque evadit, quae quidem terrestris et melancholica qualitas nominatur.⁵⁸

Through his studies, the melancholic is inevitably turned inward, acquiring an excess of those atrabillious qualities he shares with the earth, dryness and coldness. In the act of contemplation, the brain consumes the humor at its disposal, becoming dry and cold, and drives the spirit to fear, sadness, and eventually, melancholy.

To account for the medical erudition that distinguishes Savonarola's works, both pastoral and pedagogical, it seems obvious to recall Girolamo's grandfather, Michele Savonarola (1385–1466)⁵⁹—a distinguished

⁵⁸ Marsilio Ficino, *De vita libri III*, 1.4. "In the main, three kinds of causes make learned people melancholics . . . The natural cause seems to be that for the pursuit of the sciences, especially the difficult ones, the soul must draw in upon itself from external things to internal as from the circumference to the center, and while it speculates, it must stay immovably at the very center (as I might say) of man. Now to collect oneself from the circumference to the center, and to be fixed in the center, is above all the property of the Earth itself, to which black bile is analogous. Therefore black bile continually incites the soul both to collect itself together into one and to dwell on itself and to contemplate itself . . . the heat also is usually extinguished; and from this chain of events, the nature of the brain becomes dry and cold, which is known as the earthy and melancholic quality." *Three Books on Life*, 112.

⁵⁹ See Chiara Crisciani, "Michele Savonarola, medico: tra università e corte, tra latino e volgare," in *Filosofia in volgare nel Medioevo. Atti del convegno della società Italiana per lo Studio del Pensiero Medievale (S.I.S.P.M.)*, Lecce, 27–29 settembre 2002, ed. Nadia Bray and

member of the Paduan school and court physician for the Este family—and the particular access his nephew must have had to his writings. Upon closer analysis, however, it appears that Michele's medical works exerted little influence on Girolamo,⁶⁰ who is more likely to have acquired his medical knowledge from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ferrara, and from the works of Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus, since it is to these two *auctoritates* that we owe two compendia of natural and moral philosophy in which the humoral theory is regularly invoked to shed light on natural, medical, and biological phenomena. By the late Quattrocento, the circulation of Ficino's *De vita*⁶¹ would appear to have been especially conducive to the medical path Savonarola follows in his sermons: as the medical contents of Ficino's text gained cultural currency, they presented the preacher with an armory of metaphors that were sure to resonate with his listeners.

The depth of Savonarola's medical erudition does not prevent him from rehearsing some of the more conventional similes that distinguished medieval preaching: the patient, for instance, is compared to the sinner, both as one who has already committed sin and as one who is negatively predisposed towards it. Just as a disease can cause one's biological functions to fail if left untreated, so a negative disposition can lead one down the path of sin if not steered toward the straight and narrow. A sickness of the soul, sin is an evil that must be eradicated, the most natural means being that of purgation. By the same logic, the doctor finds his spiritual counterpart within the priest.

Loris Sturlese (Louvain; la-Neuve: Fédération Internationale des Instituts d'Etudes Médiévales, 2003), 433–449; Crisciani, "Exempla in medicina: epistemologia, insegnamento, retorica (secoli XIII–XV). Una proposta di ricerca," in *Exempla medicorum. Die Ärzte und ihre Beispiele (14.–18. Jahrhundert)*, ed. Mariacarla Gadebusch-Bondio and Thomas Ricklin (Florence: Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2008), 89–108; Gabriella Zuccolin, "Il ruolo dell'*exemplum* nella produzione medica e religiosa di Michele Savonarola (1385–1466)," in *Exempla medicorum*, 108–128; Danielle Jacquart, "Médecine et alchimie chez Michel Savonarole (1385–1466)," in Danielle Jacquart, *La science médicale occidentale entre deux renaissances (XII^e s.–XV^e s.)* (Brookfield: Variorum, 1997), xv.

⁶⁰ I would like to thank Professors Gabriella Zuccolin and Chiara Crisciani for their assistance in this area of research.

⁶¹ Following the translations of Plato, this is the most widespread Ficinian text, which was published throughout Europe. See Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, vol. 1, lxiv–lxvi; Alessandra Tarbochia Canavero, "Il *De triplici vita* di Marsilio Ficino, una strana vicenda ermeneutica," *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica* 69 (1977): 697–717; Patrizia Castelli, "Per una storia della fortuna degli scritti di Marsilio Ficino tra '500 e '600: note preliminari sugli scritti medici e astrologici," in *Il lume del sole. Marsilio Ficino medico dell'anima* (Florence: Opus libri, 1984), 65–91.

Savonarola clearly welcomed the personal implications of this metaphor. In a letter addressed to the friars of San Marco (15 July 1497), Girolamo fashions himself a “spiritual doctor” whose remedies are more valuable than those administered to the body

Benché non si debbino sprezzare li remedii corporali contra la peste e le altre infermità del corpo, nientedimeno senza li remedi dello spirito, sono finalmente tutti vani, perché *non possono remediare alla morte, avvenga che possino prolungare la vita*. [...] Per questo ho pensato, come medico spirituale, darvi una bona ricetta contro el morbo, la quale serà sì ottimo remedio, che né la pestilenzia, né altra infermità vi potrà mai *veramente* nuocere.⁶²

As a spiritual physician, Savonarola invites his followers to concern themselves more with the well-being of their souls than with the health of their bodies, since no cure for any bodily disease can protect against moral depravity, whereas a spiritual cure wards off both physical and moral sickness. Savonarola’s metaphor revolves around the concepts of *real* death and *real* life: a drug can prolong one’s physical life, but it cannot stave off spiritual death; the treatment prescribed by the priest, however, saves the essence of the human being: his soul. Once again, Savonarola returns to the topic of purgation, which takes on a more precise meaning than in the example cited above:

Bisogna ben purgarsi da’ cattivi umori per vera contrizione, confessione e soddisfazione de’ soi peccati, con fermo proposito di servir sempre a Dio con tutto el core. E tale purgazione e fermo proposito dovete fare spesso, in modo che voi siate sempre parati a la vocazione del Signore.⁶³

“Purgarsi da’ cattivi umori”—that is, to free oneself from sin—requires contrition and confession for the sins themselves. Just as purgation is vital for restoring health to an ailing body, so the sacrament of penance is vital to the core of every wayward Christian soul.

⁶² See Girolamo Savonarola, *Lettere e scritti apologetici*, ed. Roberto Ridolfi, Vincenzo Romano and Armando Felice Verde (Rome: Belardetti, 1984), 165 (italics mine). “Although one should not disdain physical remedies for the plague and other infirmities of the body, they are ultimately useless without spiritual remedies, for *they cannot prevent death, even though they can prolong life*. [...] Therefore I thought, as a spiritual physician, that I should offer you a good prescription against the disease, one that will be so effective that neither pestilence nor any other infirmity will ever *truly* harm you.”

⁶³ See Savonarola, *Lettere e scritti apologetici*, 165. “You need to purge yourselves of corrupt humors through true contrition, confession and penance for your sins, with a firm resolve to always serve God with all your heart. And you need to practice this purgation and firm resolve at all times, so that you may always be ready when God calls you.”

Savonarola's medical metaphors set the stage for the second sphere of Ficinian influence identified above—that is, Ficino's theory of love. Of particular interest in this regard is Savonarola's *De doctrina Platoniorum*. As noted above, the Friar's compendium of Platonic philosophy contains a summary of Ficino's *Commentarium in Platonis Convivium de amore*, which was completed in 1468 and translated into the vernacular by Ficino himself in 1474 under the title of *Libro dello amore*.⁶⁴ In the relevant section of the *De Doctrina Platoniorum*, Savonarola touches briefly on the motion of the heavens, the inferior spheres, and the description of Socrates in the seventh oration of the *Commentarium*. More to the immediate point is the information he draws from the fourth chapter of the same oration, entitled *Amoris vulgaris est fascinatio quedam (Vulgar love is a certain enchantment)*⁶⁵ in which Ficino appeals to the medical doctrine of spirits, as he does in *De vita*, to account for the transmission of love—in this case, physical love—from one individual to another. The spirits to which he refers are made of fine and transparent matter generated from the thinnest part of the blood distilled by the heart. While warm and moist in youth, they cool with the passing of time. The subtlety of this substance within the body propels it upwards, towards the brain, whence it emerges through the eyes. When one falls ill, according to Ficino, whether physically, as in the case of plague, or psychologically, as in the case of lovesickness, the infection is transmitted together with the spirit: “Quod autem radius emissus ab oculis vaporem secum spiritalem trahat et vapor iste sanguinem, ex eo perspicimus quod lippi et rubentes oculi spectantis proxime oculos radii sui emissionem cogunt morbo simili laborare” (“But the fact that a ray which is sent out by the eyes draws with it a spiritual vapour, and that this vapour draws with it blood, we observe from this, that bleary and red eyes, by the emission of their own ray, force the eyes of a beholder nearby to be afflicted with a similar disease”).⁶⁶

These spirits, he continues, can also take the form of light—for instance, in nocturnal creatures or in certain individuals of exceptional moral virtue. While Tiberius was known to have seen at night, Ficino tells us, the eyes of Augustus radiated so much light that his interlocutors were compelled to lower their gaze. As further evidence that one's spirits are physically trans-

⁶⁴ Marsilio Ficino, *Libro dell'amore*, ed. Sandra Niccoli (Florence: Olschki, 1987).

⁶⁵ Marsilio Ficino, *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis de amore*, vol. 7, 4.

⁶⁶ Marsilio Ficino, *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis de amore* 7.4. The English translation is taken from Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, trans. Sears Jayne (Dallas, TX: Spring Publications, 1985), 160.

mitted by means of vision, Ficino reports the commonplace that a person who stares at someone with an eye infection will immediately contract it, as well the popular belief perpetuated by Aristotle in *De insomniis* that a menstruating woman can stain a mirror with her gaze:

Fertur et divus Augustus oculos adeo claros et nitidos habuisse ut, cum acrius quemquam intueretur, cogeret eum quasi ad Solis fulgorem vultum submictere. Tiberius quoque pregrandibus fuisse oculis traditur et qui, quod mirum esset, noctu et in tenebris viderent [...] Scribit Aristoteles, mulieres quando sanguis menstruus defluit, intuitu suo speculum sanguineis guttis sepe fedare.⁶⁷

By the same logic, enamorment goes hand in hand with the danger of bewitchment, which Ficino tells us can occur in two different ways: either an old man or a menstruating woman can bewitch a boy by means of the *mal d'occhio*; or a youth, simply through his gaze, can corrupt an aging man or woman.

When we turn to Savonarola's *De doctrina Platoniorum*, the parallels are striking:

A calore cordis in nobis spiritus generantur qui tales sunt qualis in nobis est sanguis ulterius, bonus vel malus ex [s]piritibus, autem subtilissimus vapor ascendit, maxime per oculos egrediens, quia oculi lucidissimus est et nitidissimus, nam spiritus ad superiore [m] conscendit etc. Fertur Augustum habuisse oculos adeo claros ut, cum acrius quemque intuebatur, cogeret ipsum vultum submictere quasi ad solis fulgorem. Tiberium quoque, aiunt, adeo lucidos oculos habuisse, ut nocte dum expergiscebatur videret [...]. Lippi [et] rubentes oculos inferunt alios. Mulieres mestruate specula quia in speculi superficie nitida fit crassior etc. Aspectus fetidi senis puerum fascinat, et aspectus adolescentis seniore.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Marsilio Ficino, *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis de amore* 7.4. "And it is said that the deified Augustus had eyes so bright and shining that when he stared at someone very hard, he forced him to lower his eyes, as if before the bright light of the sun. Tiberius also is said to have had very large eyes which (this would be amazing) saw at night and in the dark... Aristotle writes that women, when the menstrual blood flows down, often soil a mirror with bloody drops by their own gaze." *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, 159–160.

⁶⁸ See Tromboni, "Girolamo Savonarola lettore di Platone," 189. "From the heat of the heart, spirits are generated within us that are like our more refined blood, which is good or bad depending upon the spirits, but a most subtle vapor rises up, exiting mainly through the eyes, since that of the eye is the brightest and the clearest, for the spirit ascends higher, etc. It is said that Augustus had eyes so bright that when he stared at someone very hard, he would make him lower his gaze as if before the bright light of the sun. Tiberius as well, they say, had eyes so lucid that he could see at night while he was awake [...]. Inflamed and ruddy eyes are harmful to others, as are menstruating women to a mirror, before

This lengthy quotation is representative of the way in which Savonarola identifies in his compendium the most salient features of Ficino's theory of love, which he then puts to pastoral use in expounding Sacred Scripture through his sermons. One of his *Prediche sopra Ezechiele* is a case in point:

Si truova ancora certi che hanno li occhi lucidi che paiono stelle, che guardando uno li fanno abbassare li occhi, come si dice che facevono li occhi di Cesare; di Tiberio ancora si diceva che vedeva la notte, e questo viene dalla buona complessione. *Item, mulier menstruata inficit specula nova. Item*, sono alcuni vecchi e vecchie maligni e cattivi che hanno tanta cattiva affissione che guastono e' fanciulli.⁶⁹

Here, Savonarola recalls the same illustrious predecessors invoked by Ficino in the *Commentarium in Convivium* to illustrate the concept of contagion, which he nevertheless casts in a positive light, intending a condition to be spread by the virtuous. Savonarola reports almost verbatim Ficino's examples of Augustus and Tiberius, whose "eyes were so lucid they seemed like stars," as he does the examples of menstruating women and the elderly, who can bewitch youths with their gaze. In this particular case, Savonarola yields considerable ground to Ficino's doctrine, leaving his original examples intact. Ultimately, however, their purpose for Savonarola is rhetorical—useful insofar as they illustrate his moral *exemplum* and invite his listeners to behave virtuously. Indeed, immediately following the Ficinian passage, the Friar recalls the example of St. Stephen and of the light he emanated through his charity, just as all who are good shed light through their love, *quasi aspectus lampadarum*.

The theme of *fascinatio*, or bewitchment, had already emerged in at least one of Savonarola's works. In his 1495 *Domenica dell'Ulivo* sermon, which belongs to his *Prediche sopra Giobbe*, we read: "Vedesi qualche donna malefica col suo sguardo fascinare e guastare e' teneri fanciullini, massime se con fissa immaginazione fanno tale operazione" ("There are some wicked women who with their gaze can corrupt tender youths,

whom its clear surface becomes clouded. The glance of an ugly old man bewitches a boy, and that of a youth does the same to the old."

⁶⁹ See Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Ezechiele*, vol. 1, 151–2. "There are also certain people whose eyes are as bright as stars; when they look at a man, they make him lower his gaze, as it is said of Caesar; it is also said that Tiberius could see at night, and this was due to his good complexion. *Item, mulier menstruata inficit specula nova. Item*, there are certain foul and wicked old men and women who have such a pernicious stare that they can corrupt the young."

especially if their imagination is fixed on this intent").⁷⁰ The Ficinian resonances noted above are already audible as Savonarola compares the interior strength of the Christian to a brightness derived from God, emanating from within, and affecting those before him. In its simplicity, the word of the true Christian confounds its opponents, who can only surrender. The goodness of one's state of mind thus exerts a positive external influence just as its wickedness exerts a negative one, as in the case of *fascinatio*, which spreads like a contagious disease.

The theme of love also appears under a different guise in Savonarola's writings, namely that of the union of the lover and the beloved. In his *De amore*, Ficino defines love as a *copula mundi*, the element that binds all creation, present in each individual and throughout the universe, drawing like to like and insuring the world's cohesion. The human dimension of this love is of particular interest to Savonarola, who, in a sermon delivered on 10 December 1494—just two days before his public denouncement of the Laurentian circle⁷¹—illustrates the notions of charity and love of neighbor in terms reminiscent of Ficino on the lover's union with his beloved:

quando uno comunica del suo ad altri volentieri, è segno che lui ama quel tale a chi lo dà [...]; e perchè l'amore è cosa unitiva e trasferisce l'amante nello amato, però questo essere largo datore è cosa dilettevole, e *ideo amicus dicitur alter ego*, cioè fa che l'amico è una medesima cosa con l'altro amico.⁷²

The same unifying strength binds man to God, he says on Epiphany of 1495, making God dwell within the human soul: "ma io dico che Iddio è venuto e la Trinità è venuta; e venuto che fussi lo Spirito Santo in noi, noi siamo con Lui e Lui con esso noi; noi amiamo Lui e Lui ama noi, e l'amante sta nello amato e lo amato nello amante" ("but I say that God has arrived and the Trinity has arrived; and since the Holy Spirit has arrived within us, we are with Him and He is with us; we love Him and He loves us, and the lover is within the beloved and the beloved is within the lover").⁷³ It is worth noting that both these sermons were delivered in the very weeks—between December 1494 and January 1495—in which Ficino purportedly

⁷⁰ See Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Giobbe*, ed. Roberto Ridolfi (Rome: Belardetti, 1957), vol. 2, 266.

⁷¹ See above, 225–226.

⁷² Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, 160. "When someone willingly shares of himself with someone else, it is an expression of love [...]; and because love is a unifying force and transforms the lover into the beloved, it is a delightful thing to be magnanimous, and *ideo amicus dicitur alter ego*, which means that the friend is one with the other."

⁷³ Savonarola, *Prediche sopra i salmi*, vol. 1, 9.

broke all ties with Savonarola, whom he would thenceforth portray as a fearsome traitor of the Florentine people.

Before drawing any conclusions from the points of intersection described above, we shall move on to the third and final point of our analysis: Savonarola's critique of astrology and divination in his *Trattato contra li astrologi*, a three-volume work published for the first time in Florence in 1497. As the Friar states in the proem, the treatise was conceived as a vulgarization of Pico della Mirandola's *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, which was left unfinished at Pico's death in 1494, and published in Bologna in 1496, substantially revised by his nephew Gianfrancesco and by Giovanni Mainardi. We need not pursue the connection between Pico's *Disputationes* and Savonarola's *Trattato*, magisterially treated by Garin some time ago.⁷⁴ It will suffice to recall Ficino's characteristic ambivalence in contemporary disputes over astrology and divination, and the unambiguous stand taken by Pico in the *Disputationes*.⁷⁵

In 1477, Ficino openly denounced the practice of astrology and divination, which presumed to override both the freedom of the human will and the uniqueness of God's omniscience. The work in question, the *Disputatio contra iudicium astrologorum*, achieved only a modest circulation through several of Ficino's letters.⁷⁶ In his later works and in his personal correspondence, however, and particularly in his widely read *De vita* and *De sole*, Ficino refers frequently to certain precepts of astrology within the broader contexts of medicine and Neoplatonic philosophy. The latter texts were accompanied by apologetic writings in which Ficino sought to qualify his position and to legitimize his use of astrology within a Christian context. It was apparently in this spirit that he wrote to Poliziano on 20 August 1494 regarding Pico's *Disputationes*,⁷⁷ a letter in which he reaffirms his diffidence of astrology, but takes care to clarify in what way and for what purpose it makes its way into his *De vita* and *De sole*. In the first case, it seemed useful to acknowledge all possible remedies for the diseases in question, even those without a scientific basis; in the second, astrology equipped him with a means of investigating divine truths.

⁷⁴ See Eugenio Garin, *Lo zodiaco della vita. La polemica sull'astrologia dal trecento al Cinquecento* (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 1976), 93–118 and the critical note in the edition of *Trattato contra li astrologi* in Girolamo Savonarola, *Scritti filosofici*, vol. 1, 401–404.

⁷⁵ For a detailed description of the phenomenon, see the introduction to Marsilio Ficino, *Scritti sull'astrologia*, ed. and trans. Ornella Pompeo Faracovi (Milan: BUR, 1999), 5–36.

⁷⁶ Edited in Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, vol. 2, 11–76.

⁷⁷ Marsilio Ficino, *Opera*, 958.

Ficino's position essentially oscillated between formal attempts to distance himself from astrology, and a practical recourse to its tenets in many of his writings. Pico's position, on the other hand, left no room for doubt. While in his youth he acknowledged the goodness of natural magic, he did so for the same reasons why, in his later *Disputationes*, he endorsed the practice of natural astrology, taking care to distinguish it from judicial astrology. In order to separate science from superstition and to purify philosophy from those beliefs that are inconsistent with the freedom of the will, he argued that judicial astrology is simply the product of multi-layered religious—and not scientific—beliefs about celestial bodies.

Savonarola's opposition to divination and astrology was already evident in his youth (1483–1485), as is clear from his *Quaestio utrum chiromantie divinatio sit licita*, preserved in the Borromeo manuscript, ff. 10v–11v.⁷⁸ In this brief *quaestio*, part of which is included in his *Trattato contra li astrologi*, the Friar argues not only against chiromancy, but against the philosophical foundations of all non-religious beliefs.

When Savonarola returns to this topic in his sermons, his opposition to all arts of divination is no less adamant. His rejection of judicial astrology is all the more fervent insofar as it is seen to undermine two of the fundamental tenets of Christianity and, therefore, of his preaching—namely, the freedom of the will and the divine prerogative to transcend the laws of nature and to submit them to his will. These concerns reflect the significance he attached to the third book of Ficino's *De vita, De vita coelitus comparanda*. While men's destinies are written in the stars, according to Ficino, the physician, by putting astrological doctrines to medical use, is capable of controlling astral influences, directing them toward one object or another in order to achieve a desired outcome.

The above mentioned sermon on Aggeus, delivered during Advent of 1494, contains *in nuce* those arguments that Savonarola will develop in the *Trattato contra li astrologi*: “Andrai cercando gli astrologi e gli indovini, lasciando lo Dio vero, ma lui permette che ti ingannino e che siano bugiardi e che venga el contrario di quello che ti aranno detto, e questo faran per la tua superbia, la quale ti ha accecato, che tu non vegga el vero” (“You will go seeking out astrologers and diviners, abandoning the true God, but he allows them to deceive you and to lie and ensures that the

⁷⁸ See Giulio Cattin, *Il primo Savonarola. Poesie e prediche autografe dal codice Borromeo* (Florence: Olschki, 1973), 272–275. On the *quaestio* and on the importance of the themes related to it, see Garfagnini, “La polemica antiastrologica del Savonarola.”

opposite of what they will have told you will occur, and these things will come to pass because of your pride, which has blinded you, so that you do not see the truth").⁷⁹ He continues:

Questi tali sono gente private della grazia di Dio e della sua speciale provvidenza, e communemente sono uomini pessimi e privati d'intelletto e senza fede, anzi reggano e governano ogni loro cosa per via di astrologia, il che non solamente è contrario alla Scrittura sacra, ma *etiam* alla filosofia naturale, perchè non possono sapere le cose contingenti future, nè molti particolari che possono accadere.⁸⁰

The first passage states that a man who trusts in any knowledge other than that which is grounded in Scripture is bound to become estranged from God. He who thinks he can do without the guidance of the Creator is guilty of pride, and his punishment is to abide in error. This blindness, which leaves him ignorant of his own misery, is his punishment for having turned his back on God—as Augustine would call it, his *aversio a Deo*.

In the second passage, a new element emerges through the Friar's reference to natural philosophy. In the *Trattato*, Savonarola is concerned to show that astrology, like all arts of divination, is not only opposed to Sacred Scripture, but to natural philosophy as well, a position he supports by deferring to the greatest of the philosophers. Developing an essentially Thomistic argument, the Friar affirms, on the one hand, the fundamental incoherence of divination, recognized by Aristotle, for whom "*de futuris contingentibus non est determinata veritas*" ("for future events the truth is indeterminate"); and, on the other, the impenetrability of certain mysteries of nature, such as the origin and formation of skies, or the formation of the embryo and the infusion of the human soul—matters of which nothing can be definitively affirmed, but over which astrology presumes to wield control.

It is important to note that this aspect of Savonarola's argument is not, however, crucial to his denunciation of astrology. Because his line of reasoning is fundamentally religious, he is generally less indebted to the authority of philosophers than he is to that of Scripture. This is particularly

⁷⁹ Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, 186.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 225. "Such people are without the grace of God and His special providence, and ordinarily they are of the worst sort, without intellect and without faith; they rule and govern their affairs by astrology, which is contrary not only to Holy Scripture, but also to natural philosophy, because they cannot possibly know future contingencies nor the many particulars which can happen." The English translation is taken from *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola*, 160.

clear in his *Apologeticus de ratione poeticae artis*, in which he sought to re-establish the proper hierarchy of arts and sciences, including poetry.⁸¹ Indeed, it appears that Savonarola's attacks in his later years were generally not addressed to single individuals, but to the cultural dynamics they helped create, be they political, philosophical, or religious. According to the Friar, these three domains overlapped in such a way that no political wrongdoing could leave the religious and cultural life of a community untarnished.

The purpose of the present study has been to gain a better understanding of Savonarola's ties to Marsilio Ficino. We would be mistaken to conclude that Savonarola's opposition to astrology or, more generally, to a philosophy that had graduated from *ancilla theologiae* to *soror*, amounts to a personal condemnation of Ficino. The Friar was primarily opposed to certain principles, secondarily to the individuals who endorsed them. His adversity to the culture represented by Ficino provides little evidence of any personal animosity, as the recurrence of Ficinian doctrines in his works makes plain. Ficino, however, was far more explicit in his estimation of the Friar, as his impassioned letters to Cavalcanti in December 1494 bear witness. The antagonism manifest in his *Apologia contra Savonarolam* was doubtless accentuated by his deep disappointment with those he believed to be following the same path. Ficino and Savonarola were of course destined to become interlocutors. No less inevitable than their encounter was the diversity of their solutions to Florence's politico-religious crisis, a diversity that imbues both their personalities and their works.

⁸¹ See Garfagnini, "La polemica antiastrologica del Savonarola," 172.

RENAISSANCE ANTHROPOLOGIES AND THE CONCEPTION OF MAN

Caroline Stark

Two sixteenth-century developments are credited with drastically altering the conception of man and his place in the universe, thus marking a fundamental shift to modernity: the Protestant Reformation and subsequent Counter-Reformation, and the emergence of the New Science. This new conception of man, either as an impotent, sinful creature in need of divine grace or as a creative, active force for improving his own condition and society, would not have been possible without the earlier debate over the condition of man among Renaissance humanists.¹ A number of notable humanists, including Petrarch, Facio, Manetti, and Pico della Mirandola,² responded to the misery of man tradition, as exemplified by Pope Innocent III's treatise on the misery of the human condition,³ by celebrating

¹ Giovanni Gentile, *Giordano Bruno e il Pensiero del Rinascimento* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1991); Eugenio Garin, "La 'Dignitas Hominis' e la Letteratura Patristica," *La Rinascita* 1 (1938): 102–46; Giovanni Di Napoli, "'Contemptus Mundi' e 'Dignitas Hominis' nel Rinascimento," *Rivista di Filosofia Neoscolastica* 48 (1956): 9–41; Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Concepts of Man, and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); Charles Trinkaus, "The Renaissance Idea of the Dignity of Man," in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York: Scribner, 1973), 136–47; Craven, *Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, Symbol of His Age: Modern Interpretations of a Renaissance Philosopher* (Geneva: Droz, 1981): 21–45; Charles Trinkaus, "Themes for a Renaissance Anthropology," in *The Scope of Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Charles Trinkaus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983), 364–403, especially 372–96; Oliver Glaap, *Untersuchungen zu Giannozzo Manetti, De dignitate et excellentia hominis: ein Renaissance-Humanist und sein Menschenbild* (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1994); M. V. Dougherty, "Three Precursors to Pico della Mirandola's Roman Disputation and the Question of Human Nature in the *Oratio*," in *Pico della Mirandola: New Essays*, ed. M. V. Dougherty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 114–51.

² Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374), *De remediis utriusque fortunae* (1360); Bartolomeo Facio (ca. 1405–1457), *De excellentia ac praestantia hominis* (ca. 1447); Giannozzo Manetti (1396–1459), *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* (ca. 1453); Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), *Oratio* (written in 1486 but published posthumously). Since the focus of this discussion will be on humanist works prior to Pico's *Oratio*, comments regarding Pico's ideas about the conception of man will be reserved until the end.

³ Pope Innocent III (Cardinal Deacon Lotario da Signa) (ca. 1160–1216), *De miseria humane conditionis* (ca. 1195). Donald Howard argues that Innocent's treatise marks the height of the "misery of man" genre that was particularly characteristic of the asceticism of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. See Donald Howard, "The Contempt of the World: A Study in the Ideology of Latin Christendom, with Emphasis on Fourteenth Century English Literature," PhD Dissertation (University of Florida, 1954); idem, *The Three Temptations: Medieval Man in Search of the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966); and

the dignity of man and asserting his divine potential. The humanist response drew not only from the patristic exegetic tradition of the “creative” man in Genesis but also from classical writers.⁴ The rediscovery by Poggio Bracciolini in 1417 of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura* and Manilius’s *Astronomica*,⁵ with their powerful assertions of man’s capacity to develop the technical and political arts and to master his environment, further fueled the debate.⁶ I would like to examine the Renaissance reception of Lucretius’s and Manilius’s anthropologies, that is, stories of the birth and development of man, in the works of two fifteenth-century humanist poets, Lorenzo Bonincontri (1410–ca. 1491) and Giovanni Pontano (1429–1503). After analyzing Bonincontri’s and Pontano’s anthropologies in light of this debate over the nature of man, I will trace how certain ideas that emerge from Renaissance anthropologies adumbrate later developments.

Howard’s introduction to Innocent III, *On the Misery of the Human Condition. De Miseria Humane Conditionis*, trans. Margaret Mary Dietz, ed. Donald Roy Howard (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969); and the introduction to idem, *De Miseria Condicionis Humane*, ed. Robert E. Lewis (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978). The Latin text of *De miseria* is taken from Michele Maccarrone, ed., *Lotharii Cardinalis (Innocentii III) De miseria humane conditionis* (Padua: Antenore, 1955). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

⁴ Two passages of great importance were Genesis 1:26: that man was made in God’s image (“creative” man, thus, is seen as made in the image of God the creator) and 1:28: that man has dominion over the animals. See Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought* (London: Constable, 1970); and idem, “Themes for a Renaissance Anthropology,” 364–403.

⁵ Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459) rediscovered both of these texts during the Council of Constance (1414–18). For the textual history of Manilius and Lucretius, see Michael Reeve, “Manilius,” in *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics*, ed. L. D. Reynolds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 235–38; and Anna Maranini, *Filologia Fantastica: Manilio e i suoi Astronomica* (Bologna: Il mulino, 1994); and Cosmo Gordon, *A Bibliography of Lucretius* (London: Hart-Davis, 1962); Wolfgang Fleischmann, “Lucretius,” in *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum: Mediaeval and Renaissance Latin Translations and Commentaries*, ed. Paul Oskar Kristeller, F. Edward Cranz, and Virginia Brown (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1971); and Michael Reeve, “The Italian Tradition of Lucretius,” *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 23 (1980): 27–48; idem, “The Italian Tradition of Lucretius Revisited,” *Aevum* 79 (2005): 115–64; idem, “Lucretius from the 1460s to the 17th Century: Seven Questions of Attribution,” *Aevum* 80 (2006): 165–84; idem, “Lucretius in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: Transmission and Scholarship,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*, ed. Stuart Gillespie and Philip R. Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 205–13.

⁶ Cf. Eugenio Garin, “La ‘Dignitas Hominis’ e la Letteratura Patristica,” 105. For the impact of classical anthropologies and of the reconciliation of those conceptions of man with Christian conceptions of man, see Charles Trinkaus, “The Renaissance Idea of the Dignity of Man”; idem, “Themes for a Renaissance Anthropology,” 364–403; Ann Blair and Anthony Grafton, “Reassessing Humanism and Science,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53:4 (1992): 535–40, 538; Susanna Gambino Longo, *Savoir de la Nature et Poésie des Choses: Lucrèce et Epicure à la Renaissance Italienne* (Paris: Champion, 2004), 262.

The role of labor in man's initial condition and the role of knowledge in his development are two important points of contention on which I will focus my discussion. First, I will sketch how these issues are addressed by the leading spokesmen in the debate about the nature of man, Innocent III and Giannozzo Manetti.⁷ I will then turn my attention to two writers who both challenged the view represented by Innocent III and expanded Manetti's arguments, Lorenzo Bonincontri, whose *De rebus naturalibus et divinis* (ca. 1475),⁸ was written to Ferdinand of Aragon, and Giovanni Pontano, who wrote a didactic astronomical poem, the *Urania* (1476–80), and dedicated it to his son, Lucio. Due to the limited scope of this essay, I will only briefly sketch the extent to which Bonincontri and Pontano drew from classical authors, particularly Lucretius and Manilius, whom they both had edited and commented on.⁹ Bonincontri lectured on Manilius in Florence in 1475–78 and wrote the first commentary on the *Astronomica* in 1484.¹⁰ Giovanni Pontano's work on Lucretius influenced

⁷ Maccarrone, Howard, and Lewis have surveyed the number of manuscripts, printed editions, and translations of *De miseria* from the late eleventh century into the seventeenth century attesting to its continued importance for the misery of man tradition, estimating approximately 672 manuscripts, 52 printed editions, and translations into almost all the major European languages. See especially Michele Maccarrone, ed., *Lotharii Cardinalis (Innocentii III) De miseria humane conditionis*, x–xxii; and Innocent III, *De Miseria Conditionis Humane*, ed. Robert E. Lewis, 3–5, 66–67 n. 8–10. For an examination of how Manetti's treatise both elaborates upon and draws from earlier humanist works, particularly those of Petrarch, Facio, and Antonio da Barga, see Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 173–270; and Oliver Glaap, *Untersuchungen zu Giannozzo Manetti, De dignitate et excellentia hominis: ein Renaissance-Humanist und sein Menschenbild*.

⁸ I refer to this work by the title given in Heilen's 1999 edition, *De rebus naturalibus et divinis* (hereafter *DRND II*). Since Bonincontri wrote three books of the same title to Lorenzo de' Medici, I distinguish the three books to Ferdinand of Aragon (Ferrante I) as *DRND II*. Passages of Bonincontri are from Lorenzo Bonincontri, *Laurentius Bonincontrius Miniatisensis: De rebus naturalibus et divinis: Zwei Lehrgedichte an Lorenzo de' Medici und Ferdinand von Aragonien*, ed. Stephan Heilen (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1999).

⁹ The importance of these classical authors and this discussion of the nature of man in Naples will be discussed in greater detail in a forthcoming work.

¹⁰ See the work of Benedetto Soldati, *La Poesia Astrologica nel Quattrocento; Ricerche e Studi* (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1906); Patrizia Landucci Ruffo, "Lorenzo Bonincontri e alcuni suoi Scritti Ignorati," *Rinascimento* 5 (1965): 171–94; Armando Felice Verde, "Giovanni Argiropolo e Lorenzo Buonincontri Professori nello Studio Fiorentino," *Rinascimento* 14 (1974): 279–87; Georg Roellenbleck, *Das Epische Lehrgedicht Italiens im Fünfzehnten und Sechzehnten Jahrhundert: ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte des Humanismus und der Renaissance* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1975), 49–62; W. Hübner, "Die Rezeption des Astrologischen Lehrgedichts des Manilius in der Italienischen Renaissance," in *Humanismus und Naturwissenschaften*, ed. Rudolf Schmitz and Fritz Krafft (Boppard: H. Boldt, 1980), 29–67; Anna Maranini, *Filologia Fantastica: Manilio e i suoi Astronomica* 181–84; Arthur Field, "Lorenzo Buonincontri and the First Public Lectures on Manilius (Florence ca. 1475–78),"

the Giunta edition of 1512–13,¹¹ and his long-standing interest in Lucretius is attested by his student, Girolamo Borgia.¹² In addition, both Bonincontri and Pontano wrote poems and other works inspired and influenced by these classical authors.

The Debate Over Man

The two-sided nature of the debate over man in the Renaissance, frequently expressed in terms of his circumstance and his potential,¹³ resulted in two competing yet complementary genres on the misery and dignity of man. At times, works included paired treatments,¹⁴ such as Petrarch's *De reme-*

Rivista dell' Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento 36 (1996): 207–25; Stephan Heilen, *Concordantia in Laurentii Bonincontri Miniatensis Carmina De rebus naturalibus et diuinis* (Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 2000).

¹¹ See the preface to the 1512 Giunta edition, iir–iiv.

¹² See Benedetto Soldati, *La Poesia Astrologica nel Quattrocento; Recherche e Studi* 1906; Erasmo Pèrcopo and Michele Manfredi, *Vita di Giovanni Pontano* (Naples: I.T.E.A. Industrie Tipografiche, 1938); Giuseppe Toffanin, *Giovanni Pontano: fra l'uomo e la Natura* (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1938); Francesco Tateo, *Astrologia e Moralità in Giovanni Pontano* (Bari: Adriatica Editrice, 1960); Mauro De Nichilo, ed., *I Poemi Astrologici di Giovanni Pontano: Storia del Testo* (Bari: Dedalo libri, 1975); W. Hübner, "Die Rezeption des Astrologischen Lehrgedichts des Manilius in der Italienischen Renaissance"; Charlotte Goddard, "Pontano's Use of the Didactic Genre: Rhetoric, Irony and the Manipulation of Lucretius in *Urania*," *Renaissance Studies* 5:3 (1991): 250–62; Carol Kidwell, *Pontano: Poet & Prime Minister* (London: Duckworth, 1991); Yasmin Haskell, "Renaissance Latin Didactic Poetry on the Stars: Wonder, Myth, and Science," *Renaissance Studies* 12:4 (1998): 495–522; passages are from Benedetto Soldati, ed., *Ioannis Ioviani Pontani Carmina. Testo Fondato sulle Stampe Originali, e Riveduto sugli Autografi, Introduzione Bibliografica, ed Appendice di Poesie Inedite* (Florence: G. Barbèra, 1902). See Charlotte Goddard, "Pontano's Use of the Didactic Genre: Rhetoric, Irony and the Manipulation of Lucretius in *Urania*," 251, n.5, where she mentions three 1495 Venetian editions of Lucretius with Borgia's comments attesting to Pontano's fondness for Lucretius (of which I have only seen the first) (British Library IA 23564; Venice, Marciana Incunabula V.702; Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale Incunabula VIII.C.46).

¹³ Charles Trinkaus, *Adversity's Noblemen: the Italian Humanists on Happiness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 39–79; Giovanni Di Napoli, "'Contemptus Mundi' e 'Dignitas Hominis' nel Rinascimento," 12.

¹⁴ Fazio's earlier work, *De vite foelicitate* (ca. 1445), should be seen as a companion work to his *De excellentia*. Scholars have pointed to Fazio's conservative statements in *De excellentia* dedicated to Pope Nicholas V. Cf. Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 228–29; Claudio Marchiori, *Bartolomeo Fazio tra Letteratura e Vita* (Milan: Marzorati, 1971) 86–87. But the more conventional position in *De excellentia* should be counterbalanced by the more optimistic and progressivist statements in *De foelicitate*, which was dedicated appropriately to an active patron of humanists, Alfonso V of Aragon and I of Naples (also the dedicatee and instigator of Manetti's treatise). The text of both *De foelicitate* and *De excellentia* are taken from *Bibl. Vatic. Cod. Urb. lat.* 227, 112r–169r. For more on Fazio, see Uberto Mazzini, "Appunti e noti-

diis utriusque fortunae, which has both admonitions and exhortations to man in the form of a dialogue between *Ratio* (reason) and the daughters of Prosperity and Adversity.¹⁵ Innocent himself promised to write a companion work on the dignity of man,¹⁶ but his failure to do so prompted many humanists to write the counterpart to his work. In fact, Petrarch and Facio expressly state their intention of fulfilling Innocent's promise as the motivation behind their works on the dignity of man,¹⁷ and they

zie per servire alla bio-bibliografia di Bartolomeo Facio," *Giornale storico e letterario della Liguria* 4 (1903): 400–54; Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Humanist Bartolomeo Facio and His Unknown Correspondence," in *From the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation: Essays in Honor of Garrett Mattingly*, ed. Charles H. Carter (New York: Random House, 1965), 56–74; Claudio Marchiori, *Bartolomeo Facio tra Letteratura e Vita*; Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 200–29; Ennio Rao, "Introduction: The Life and Works of Bartolomeo Facio, Humanist," in *Investive in Laurentium Vallam*, ed. Ennio Rao (Naples: Società editrice Napoletana, 1978), 13–25; Oliver Glaap, *Untersuchungen zu Giannozzo Manetti, De dignitate et excellentia hominis: ein Renaissance-Humanist und sein Menschenbild*, 91–116.

¹⁵ The Latin text of *De remediis* is taken from *Bibl. Vatic. Cod. Urb. lat. 334. De remediis* was Petrarch's mostly widely read work, existing in many manuscripts and printed editions into the eighteenth century. See Nicholas Mann, "The Manuscripts of Petrarch's *De remediis*, a Checklist," *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 14 (1971): 57–90; and Willard Fiske, *Francis Petrarch's Treatise De remediis utriusque fortunae, Text and Versions* (Florence: Le Monnier press, 1888). For more on Petrarch's *De remediis*, see especially Klaus Heitmann, *Fortuna und Virtus: eine Studie zu Petrarca's Lebensweisheit* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1958); Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 3–50, 173–99; idem, *The Poet as Philosopher: Petrarch and the Formation of Renaissance Consciousness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 114–35; and Rawski's translation and commentary in Francesco Petrarca, *Petrarch's Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul: A Modern English Translation of De remediis utriusque fortune, with a Commentary*, trans. Conrad Rawski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

¹⁶ "Si vero paternitas vestra suggesserit, dignitatem humane nature Christo favente describam, quatinus ita per hoc humilietur elatus ut per illud humilis exaltetur" ("But if your fatherly care suggests it, I will, with Christ's favor, describe the dignity of human nature, in so far as through this work the proud man is humbled as through that work the humble man is exalted"). Innocent III, *De miseria Prologus*.

¹⁷ In his letter to the Grand Prior of the Carthusians, who had urged him to fulfill Innocent's promise to write a complementary work on the dignity of man, Petrarch explains that he was undertaking just such an inquiry into man's dignity by examining the different ways to alleviate mankind's sadness and misery "ubi me rogas ut de dignitate conditionis humanae librum Innocentio iii promissum impleam alterius . . . eo ipso die tua supervenit epistola hoc ipsum vehementer exoptulans quasi quid tunc agerem sciens" ("When you ask me to fulfill the other, the book which had been promised by Innocent III concerning the dignity of the human condition . . . on that very day your letter arrived unexpectedly insisting vehemently on this very thing as if knowing what I was doing at that time"). *Epistolae rerum senilium* 16.9, in *Bibl. Vatic. Cod. Urb. lat. 331*, 260r–261r. The English translation is taken from Francis Petrarch, *Letters of Old Age*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo, Saul Levin, and Reta A. Bernardo (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), vol. 2, 640–642. Cf. *De remediis* 2.93. See the discussion in Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 179–80, 392–93. In the preface to *De*

directly address Innocent's arguments in their discussion. The fourth book of Manetti's *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* is specifically devoted to responding to the misery of man tradition and Innocent's points.¹⁸ Other humanists, like Poggio Bracciolini,¹⁹ wrote treatises on the misery of man like Innocent. While Innocent and Manetti are seen as leading proponents of each side of the tradition of the misery and dignity of man, it is important to see these two genres working in tandem, especially in the early part of the tradition and even as the later humanist treatises on the dignity of man become ever more expansive and solitary. Both genres were extremely influential in Renaissance anthropologies, as they discussed the various conditions and factors that shaped the birth and development of man.

The Role of Labor

Man's initial condition at birth or creation determines, to a large extent, the parameters of his development in terms of his status relative to other

excellentia addressed to Nicholas V, Facio specifically cites fulfilling Innocent's promise to write on the dignity of man as the motivation for his work (*Urb. lat.* 227, 150v).

¹⁸ "In quo ea confutaremus que a pluribus idoneis auctoribus de laudatione et bono mortis et de miseria humane vite conscripta fuisse intelligebamus, quoniam illa nostris quodammodo adversari et repugnare non ignoramus" ("[The fourth book] in which we refute those things which we understand have been written by many worthy authors about the praiseworthiness and goodness of death and about the misery of the human life, since we are not unaware that those things oppose and are in a certain way incompatible with our statements"). *De dignitate Prefatio*, 5. The text of *De dignitate* is taken from Leonard's 1975 edition. For more on Manetti, see Wilhelm Zorn, *Gianozzo Manetti: seine Stellung in der Renaissance* (Endingen am Kaiserstuhl, Baden, 1939); Lauro Martines, *The Social World of the Florentine Humanists, 1390–1460* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 131–38, 176–91; Eugenio Garin, *Italian Humanism: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975), 56–60; Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 173–270; Christoph Dröge, *Giannozzo Manetti als Denker und Hebraist* (New York: P. Lang, 1987); Giovanni Gentile, *Giordano Bruno e il Pensiero del Rinascimento*, 44–67; Oliver Glaap, *Untersuchungen zu Giannozzo Manetti, De dignitate et excellentia hominis: ein Renaissance-Humanist und sein Menschenbild*; Giannozzo Manetti, *Biographical Writings*, ed. Stefano Ugo Baldassarri and Rolf Bagemihl (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), vii–xix; Christine Smith and Joseph O'Connor, *Building the Kingdom: Giannozzo Manetti on the Material and Spiritual Edifice* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006); and Stefano U. Baldassarri, ed., *Dignitas et Excellentia Hominis: Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi su Giannozzo Manetti: Georgetown University-Kent State University, Fiesole-Firenze, 18–20 Giugno 2007* (Florence: Le lettere, 2008).

¹⁹ Poggio Bracciolini, *De miseria conditionis humanae* (1455) in *Bibl. Vatic. Cod. Urb. lat.* 224, 130r–161r. See Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 258–70.

animals, his inherent physical or mental limitations, and the external environmental obstacles he faces. Christian proponents of the “misery of man” tradition focused their disparagements of man’s initial condition largely on his body, denigrating its material, its conception, its weaknesses and natural deficiencies in comparison to animals, and its mortality.²⁰ In their view, man’s wretched condition at birth is due to his “fallen” state, and therefore, his earthly existence and ultimate death are punishment for original sin. Innocent revisits many of these arguments, marshalling quotes from Scripture and church fathers as authorities to substantiate his claims. The humanists who responded to Innocent not only countered with the traditional Christian arguments of the “dignity of man” tradition, such as the Incarnation and the immortality of the soul, but they also used ancient sources and their adept philological knowledge to undermine the validity of Innocent’s arguments and to question his conclusions.

Innocent opens his treatise, *De miseria humanae conditionis*, with a lament on the miserable condition of man at his birth. In view of the misfortunes that await him, man would have been better off never to have been born. For this reason, according to Innocent, man enters the world crying:

Omnes nascimur eiulantes, ut nature miseriam exprimamus. Masculus enim recenter natus dicit a, femina vero e. Unde versus:

Et dicent e vel a quotquot nascuntur ab Eva.

Quid est igitur Eva nisi heu-a? Utrumque dolentis est interiectio, doloris exprimens magnitudinem.²¹

For Innocent, a man’s life is doomed at its inception: “Natus ad laborem, timorem et dolorem: quodque miserius est ad mortem” (“[Man] is born to labor, fear, and grief: and what is more miserable, to death”).²²

Innocent enumerates the many reasons for man’s wretched condition: the body’s base material, the lustful circumstances of conception, mankind’s weak and fragile nature, and mankind’s reduced circumstances

²⁰ See Donald Howard, “The Contempt of the World: A Study in the Ideology of Latin Christendom, with Emphasis on Fourteenth Century English Literature”; idem, *The Three Temptations: Medieval Man in Search of the World*; and Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*.

²¹ *De miseria* 1.6.1. “We are all born wailing, in order that we may express the misery of our nature. For a boy recently born says, ‘ah,’ but a girl, ‘e’. Whence the verse:

And all who are born from Eva will say e or ah.

What is Eva, therefore, except ‘heu! ah!’? Each is an interjection of suffering, expressing the immensity of grief.”

²² Ibid., 1.1.3.

because of original sin. Innocent denounces the material from which man is made, both that of the first man, Adam, and that of his subsequent descendants:

Formatus est homo de pulvere, de luto, de cinere: quodque vilius est de spurcissimo spermate. Conceptus in pruritu carnis, in fervore libidinis, in fetore luxurie: quodque deterius est in labe peccati.²³

Innocent vilifies man's origin because he was made from the lowest of the four elements, in descending order: fire, air, water, earth. His rank among creation, therefore, is equivalent not to heavenly creatures, which are made from fire, but to beasts, which are also made from the earth.²⁴ Far worse than the origin of the first man, Adam, is that of his offspring.²⁵ Adam's descendants are conceived in sin and born with the stain of original sin: "O gravis necessitas et infelix conditio: antequam peccamus peccato costringimur et antequam delinquamus delicto tenemur" ("O heavy necessity and unhappy condition! Before we sin, we are fettered to sin and before we commit a crime, we are convicted of the crime").²⁶ Just as a pure liquid becomes polluted when it is poured into a filthy container, the soul is contaminated by its contact with the body.²⁷ Consequently the

²³ Ibid., 1.1.3. "Man was formed from dust, from mud, from ash: and what is more worthless from the most filthy seed. He was conceived in the itch of the flesh, in the heat of passion, in the stench of debauchery: and what is worse with the stain of sin."

²⁴ "Formavit igitur Dominus Deus hominem de limo terre", que ceteris est indignior elementis. Planetas et stellas fecit ex igne, flatus et ventos fecit ex aere, pisces et volucres fecit ex aqua: homines et iumenta fecit de terra. Considerans igitur aquatica homo se vilem inveniet, considerans aerea se viliozem agnoscet, considerans ignea se vilissimum reputabit, nec valebit se parificare celestibus, nec audebit se preferre terrenis, quia parem se iumentis inveniet et similem recognoscet" ("Therefore the Lord God formed man from the mud of the earth" (Genesis 2:7), which is less worthy than the other elements. He made the planets and stars from fire, He made the breezes and winds from air, He made the fish and birds from water: He made men and beasts from earth. Therefore, man, considering aquatic life, will discover that he is low, considering aerial life, he will acknowledge that he is lower, considering fiery life he will reckon that he is the lowest, neither will he value himself equal to heavenly beings, nor will he dare to place himself before earthly beings, since he will discover that he is equal to the beasts and will recognize his likeness"). Ibid., 1.2.1.

²⁵ "Verum illud forsitan respondebis, quod Adam ipse fuit de limo terre formatus, tu autem ex humano semine procreatus. At ille fuit formatus de terra, sed virgine; tu vero procreatus de semine, sed immundo" ("But perhaps you will reply that Adam himself was formed from the mud of the earth, but you were conceived from human seed. That one was formed from earth, but virgin earth; you were conceived from seed, but unclean seed"). Ibid., 1.2.3.

²⁶ Ibid., 1.3.4.

²⁷ "Unde semina concepta fedantur, maculantur et vitiantur, ex quibus tandem anima infusa contrahit labem peccati, maculam culpe, sordem iniquitatis. Sicut ex vase corrupto

soul, irrespective of its material or origin, is circumscribed by its imprisonment within the body,²⁸ and the soul's powers are corrupted.²⁹ For Innocent, the base or sinful material from which the body is made, either from earth or from seed, limits mankind from the outset, and his bleak future is further compromised by the inborn taint of original sin.

In addition to criticizing man's origin, Innocent scornfully disparages mankind's wretched condition at birth and points to his nakedness and vulnerability. At birth, mankind lacks knowledge, speech, and virtue,³⁰ and, worst of all, man has greater deficiencies than animals. Animals are able to walk as soon as they are born, but mankind cannot walk upright or even crawl:

Flebiles, debiles, imbecilles, parum a brutis distantes, immo minus in multis habentes: nam illa statim ut exorta sunt gradiuntur, nos autem non solum erecti pedibus non incedimus, verum etiam curvati manibus non reptamus.³¹

This sentiment is not very far from a passage in book five of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* that would be echoed by many later writers: "Then further the child . . . lies naked upon the ground, speechless, in need of every kind of vital support."³² While he argues that man's wretched condition at

liquor infusus corrumpitur et pollutum contingens ex ipso contactu polluitur" ("Whence the seeds conceived are defiled, polluted, and corrupted, from which finally the soul, which has been poured in, draws together the stain of sin, the disgrace of guilt, and the filth of iniquity. Just as a liquid, which has been poured in, is ruined from a spoiled container and touching something polluted is polluted from the contact itself"). Ibid., 1.3.1.

²⁸ "Nam carcer anime corpus est" ("for the body is the prison of the soul"). Ibid., 1.20.1.

²⁹ Innocent describes the rational, irascible, and the concupiscent powers of the soul, which are corrupted by the soul's encounter with the body and its corresponding vices of ignorance, rage, and lust. Ibid., 1.3.2–3.

³⁰ "Cum generaliter omnes sine scientia, sine verbo, sine virtute nascamur" ("since generally we all are born without knowledge, without speech, without virtue"). Ibid. 1.5.2. Cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 22.24, who explains that these attributes of man may appear non-existent in infants but are, in fact, dormant and will be aroused and developed with time.

³¹ Ibid., 1.5.2. "At the time of birth we are pitiable, helpless, and weak, differing little from animals, and having less in many respects: for animals walk directly after they are born; but not only do we not walk upright on our feet but bent we cannot even crawl on our hands."

³² The entire passage reads: "Tum porro puer, ut saevis proiectus ab undis/ navita, nudus humi iacet, infans, indigus omni/ vitali auxilio, cum primum in luminis oras/ nixibus ex alvo matris natura profudit,/ vagituque locum lugubri complet, ut aequumst/ cui tantum in vita restet transire malorum./ at variae crescunt pecudes armenta feraeque, . . . / nec varias quaerunt vestes pro tempore caeli,/ denique non armis opus est, non moenibus altis,/ qui sua tumentur, quando omnibus omnia large/ tellus ipsa parit naturaque daedala rerum" ("Then further the child, like a sailor cast forth by the cruel waves, lies naked upon

birth proves the absence of God's providence in man's creation, Innocent sees man's condition as evidence of God's punishment of mankind for original sin. Although made from the same earthly matter, man is now far below the animals. Instead of his previous dominion over the animals (Genesis 1:28), mankind is now the lowest on the food chain: "Nam qui creati fuimus, ut dominaremur piscibus maris et volatilibus celi et universis animantibus que moventur in terra, nunc damur illis in predam, damur in escam" (For we who were created to be masters over the fish of the sea and over the flying creatures of the sky and over all the living creatures that move on the earth, now we are given to those creatures for prey, we are given for food).³³

Not only is man ill-equipped to face the environmental hazards and necessities of life in comparison to animals, but also his whole existence on earth is fraught with ethical battles and mortal dangers.³⁴ Due to its fallen condition, mankind is subject to death and to a life of labor and perpetual care:

Avis nascitur ad volandum, et homo nascitur ad laborem. Cuncti dies eius laboribus et erumpnis pleni sunt, nec per noctem requiescit mens eius . . . O quam varia sunt studia hominum, quam diversa sunt exercitia. Unus est tamen omnium finis et idem effectus, labor et afflictio spiritus. "Occupatio magna creata est omnibus hominibus et iugum grave super filios Adam a die exitus de ventre matris eorum usque in diem sepulture in matrem omnium" (Ecclesiasticus 40:1).³⁵

the ground, speechless, in need of every kind of vital support, as soon as nature has split him forth with throes from his mother's womb into the regions of light, and he fills all around with doleful wailings—as is but just, seeing that so much trouble awaits him in life to pass through. But the diverse flocks and herds grow, and wild creatures . . . they seek no raiment according to the temperature of the season, lastly they need no weapons, no lofty walls to protect their own, since for them all the earth herself brings forth all they want in abundance, and nature the cunning fashioner of things"). *DRN* 5:222–34. The English translation is from Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, ed. Martin Ferguson Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

³³ *De miseria* 1.19.3. "For we who were created to be masters over the fish of the sea and over the flying creatures of the sky and over all the living creatures that move on the earth, now we are given to those creatures for prey, we are given for food."

³⁴ "Militia ergo est vita hominis super terram". An nonne vera militia est, cum multiplices hostes semper undique insidentur ut capiant, persequantur ut perimant, demon et homo, mundus et caro? Demon cum vitiis, homo cum bestiis, mundus cum elementis, caro cum sensibus" ("Therefore, the life of man on earth is warfare" (Job 7:1). Or is it not true warfare, when numerous enemies, the devil and man, the world and flesh, always lie everywhere in ambush to seize us, pursue us to destroy us? The devil with vices, man with the beasts, the world with the elements, and the flesh with the senses"). *Ibid.*, 1.19.1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.11.1–2. "A bird is born for flying, and man is born to labor. All his days are full of labors and hardships, nor does his mind rest during the night . . . O how various are the pursuits of mankind, how diverse are his exercises. Nevertheless the end of all things is

Born with inherent deficiencies and the taint of original sin, Innocent depicts a man's life from creation to death as one of hardship, suffering, and punishment.

While Innocent's view of man's miserable condition is predicated on his "fall" from divine grace, a similar sentiment is found in some classical authors who view man's current condition of labor as a result of the loss of the natural abundance of the Golden Age. In Virgil's first *Georgic*, Jupiter ends the happy age of Saturn and ushers in an era of relentless labor and oppressing need.³⁶ Thus, in antiquity and in the Christian tradition, the end of the Golden Age or expulsion from the Garden of Eden marks the transition in man's condition from one of leisure to one of labor.

The humanists who wrote in opposition to the view represented by Innocent III, and in support of man's dignity, rejected Innocent's outright condemnation of the body. Although they often conceded that man had certain disadvantages at birth, they qualified this concession by pointing out that God had given man the ability to overcome these obstacles. Giannozzo Manetti, in his *On the dignity and excellence of man* (1453), addresses the larger "misery of man" tradition and specifically counters Innocent's negative portrayal of man's initial condition by undermining the reasons behind Innocent's complaints, by using Christian articles of faith, and by revisiting classical arguments that celebrate the beauty of the body and its erect stature.

Drawing upon his mastery of ancient languages (Greek, Latin, and Hebrew),³⁷ Manetti challenges what he considers the linguistic "foundations" of the larger traditions' vilification of man's origin and of Innocent's understanding of the meaning of the first woman's name, *Eva*. Manetti opens his work with a linguistic analysis of the reasons for the derogatory remarks over man's body, namely the belief that the word for man derives from the material from which he is made: *homo* from *humus* (soil) in Latin

one and the result the same: labor and suffering of life. 'Great employment was made for all men and a heavy yoke over the sons of Adam from the day of their coming out from their mother's womb right up to the day of their burial into the mother of all' (*Ecclesiasticus* 40: 1)."

³⁶ *Georgics* 1.121–146.

³⁷ Manetti translated the Psalms, the Gospels, the letters of St. Paul, and the book of Revelation, and he also wrote about biblical interpretation. For more on his work as translator, see Leonard's preface to Giannozzo Manetti, *Ianotii Manetti De dignitate et excellentia hominis*, ed. Elizabeth Leonard (Padua: Antenore, 1975), ix; Christoph Dröge, *Giannozzo Manetti als Denker und Hebraist*; and Alfonso De Petris, "Manetti, teorico e apologeta dell'arte umanistica del tradurre," in *Dignitas et Excellentia Hominis: Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi su Giannozzo Manetti*, 169–87.

and *Adam* from *edon* (red earth) in Hebrew.³⁸ Based on the account of creation in Scripture (Genesis 2:7) and according to Lactantius,³⁹ the best name for man is actually the Greek word *antropōn* (*ana*, upwards, *tropos*, turn) because it expresses the purpose of his creation, the contemplation of his creator.⁴⁰ Like Petrarch and Facio before him, Manetti stresses mankind's divine purpose and potential rather than his humble origin or material.⁴¹ Later in book four, Manetti addresses Innocent's claim that Eve's name reflects mankind's wretched entrance into the world. After feigning humble deference to the supreme pontiff,⁴² Manetti elaborates at length on the reason for the name of Adam's wife, Eve. Her name derives not from a child's first expressions of grief and misery as Innocent claims; she is called Eve because she is the mother of all things. Manetti cites Genesis 3:20 as evidence:

Moyses enim, divino spiritu afflatus, in principio Geneseos ita inquit: 'Et vocavit Adam nomen uxoris sue Evam eo quod mater esset cunctorum viventium' (Genesis 3:20). Itaque huiusmodi Eve cognomine propterea appellata fuit, quoniam mater et origo et principium esset omnium hominum qui ab ea, veluti a primeva radice, propagandi et oriundi errant.⁴³

While Manetti argues that the meaning of her name is clear in the Latin text of Genesis, he also points out that it is even clearer in the Hebrew

³⁸ *De dignitate* 1.1.

³⁹ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 2.1.15–16.

⁴⁰ "In sacris litteris ab omnipotenti deo mirabiliter formatum fuisse legimus; quod ipse per rationalis anime creationem atque inspirationem divinitus vivificans ad contemplationem sui artificis erexit" ("In the sacred letters we read that [man] has been shaped marvellously by almighty God; that God himself, while bringing him to life through the creation of a rational soul and a breathing into him of divine spirit, placed him upright for the contemplation of his creator"). *De dignitate* 1.1.

⁴¹ Petrarch, *De remediis, Urb. lat.* 334, 230v and Facio, *De excellentia, Urb. lat.* 227, 153f–157v.

⁴² "Unde se se optima futuri edifici fundamenta iactasse putat, que profecto talia sunt ut, nisi me debita summi pontificis reverentia, quemadmodum ait poeta noster, contineret, leviam quendam et puerilia et a pontificia et ab apostolica gravitate longe aliena esse contenderem" ("Whence he thinks that he has put down the best foundations for his future construction, which surely are such that, if due reverence for the supreme pontiff were not restraining me, just as our poet says, I would contend that certain things are frivolous, childish, unsuitable, and far from pontifical and apostolic seriousness"). *De dignitate* 4.45.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 4.46. "For Moses, inspired by the Holy Spirit, in the beginning of Genesis says thus: 'And Adam called the name of his wife Eva because she was the mother of all living creatures.' And so on that account Eve was called by a name of this sort, since she is the mother and origin and beginning of all mankind who were to be produced by her and to have descended from her, just as from a youthful root."

text.⁴⁴ Manetti continues the philological lesson by correcting Innocent's assertion that Eve was called *virago* before the fall and only afterwards earned the name *Eva*. Manetti explains that Jerome used the term *virago* from *vir* in order to be faithful to the Hebrew *hisca* from *hisc*, as reflecting linguistically Eve's creation from Adam.⁴⁵ Manetti cites a classical source, Josephus, which clearly explains both the meaning of the Hebrew and the reasons for Eve's name.⁴⁶ He does not fail to point out that such basic mistakes could have been avoided had Innocent studied the texts in Hebrew as he has done. By exerting his philological prowess and his knowledge of ancient, patristic, and scriptural sources, Manetti challenges basic assumptions of the misery of man tradition and undermines Innocent's authority.

To Innocent's attacks on the body of man (its origin and conception, its inherent weaknesses, and its reduced circumstances), Manetti responds not only with conventional arguments of a religious and providential nature but also with direct responses to Innocent's complaints. Like Petrarch and Facio, Manetti counters disparagements of the body by drawing from many of the religious arguments common to the dignity of man tradition: man made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26), mankind's dominion over the animals and all of creation (Genesis 1:28), the resurrection of the body, the Incarnation, and the immortality of the soul. Manetti also makes use of conventional arguments that prove God's providential care for mankind: man's physical beauty, erect stature, heavenly orientation, and the provisions of nature for survival and for pleasure. Quoting long passages of Lactantius and Cicero, Manetti presents man both as a marvel of nature and a spectator of heaven, attesting both to his creation by God and to his divine destiny.⁴⁷ To Innocent's specific points, Manetti attributes the weakness and mortality of man's body not to his nature but to sin.⁴⁸ Although made of earth, man is superior to other

⁴⁴ Ibid., 4.46.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.47.

⁴⁶ "Hisca hebraica lingua 'mulier' appellatur, nomen vero mulieris illius erat Eva, que significat omnium viventium matrem" ("Mulier is called *hisca* in the Hebrew language, but the name of that woman was Eve, which means mother of all living things"). Ibid., 4.47. The reference is to *Antiquitates Judaicae* 1.1.2.

⁴⁷ Cf. *De dignitate* 1.3–12 with Cicero *De natura deorum* 2.54/178–58/146 and *De dignitate* 1.13–32 with Lactantius *De opificio Dei*.

⁴⁸ "Itaque omnem corporis imbecillitatem et quascunque egritudines et cetera queque eius incommoda a nobis antea commemorata non ex natura sua sed potius ex peccati labe contraxit. Unde quicquid mali in presentiarum habere ac possidere existimatur et creditur merito non eius nature sed prime potius transgressioni, quemadmodum supra diximus,

animals of creation, including beasts and cattle, because he is a rational animal with wisdom and foresight. God created man's body for the purpose of acting, speaking, and understanding, and by so doing, elevated him above all creation:

Et piscibus quoque et avibus, que ex ipso aere, et iumentis, que ex terra pariter secum animata prodierant, admirabilius apparebat, nam hoc animal rationale, providum, et sagax multo propterea nobilius corpus quam iumenta et pecora habebat, cum quibus in propria materia convenire videbatur, quoniam ad agendum et ad eloquendum et ad intelligendum, quibus illa carebant, longe aptius et accommodatius erat.⁴⁹

In response to Innocent's remarks about the conception of man and how the embryo is nourished, Manetti claims that mankind comes from a superior and more delicate seed and is nourished by a stronger and purer blood than all other animals.⁵⁰ Far from being a disadvantage, man's nakedness at birth is precisely due to man's dignity and beauty: fur would only cover the body's natural beauty.⁵¹ While conceding that man has many deficiencies and many labors, Manetti points to the various remedies and pleasures provided by Nature and by God.⁵² Every task

attribuendum est" ("And so man has contracted all weakness of body and whatever sicknesses and other disadvantages of his, which have been mentioned previously by us, not from his nature but rather from the stain of sin. Whence whatever evil the body is thought and is believed to have and to possess in the present circumstances must be attributed deservedly not to its nature but rather to the first sin, just as we have said above"). *De dignitate* 4.20.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 4.27. "And [man] appeared more wondrous than the fish and even the birds, which were made from the air itself, and the beasts, which had come forth equally with him as living creatures from the earth, for this creature is rational, foreseeing, and wise, and, moreover, has a much more noble body than the beasts and the flocks, with which he seemed to consist in the same material, since the body was more fit and more suitable by far for acting, for speaking, and for thinking, which things those animals were lacking."

⁵⁰ Ibid., 4.29.

⁵¹ "De nuditate hominis inde incipientes pauca dicemus...Ad quod nos decoris et pulchritudinis causa homines ita nasci oportuisse respondemus. Primo namque, si variis diversisque pellibus instar brutorum cooperti et induti nasceremur, quam turpis et quam fedus esset aspectus ille satis dici explicarive non *posset*" ("Whence starting off we will say a few things about the nakedness of man...to which we reply that it was not fitting for the sake of comeliness and beauty that men be born in such a way. For at first, if we were born covered and dressed in various and different skins like the beasts, it could not be said or explained enough how ugly and how filthy that appearance would be"). Ibid., 4.50.

⁵² "Et si natura corpora nobis infirma, ut ait Cicero, et imbecilla et fragilia largita est, quod negare et inficiari non possumus, iam plurima huius infirmitatis, inbecillitatis, et fragilitatis nostre remedia, ut supra diximus, affatim abundeque subministravit" ("Although nature has bestowed upon us weak, feeble, and frail bodies, as Cicero says, a fact which we cannot deny or disown, already she has furnished abundantly and plentifully very many

has some pleasure, either to man's external or internal senses, and every evil has a remedy.⁵³

Whereas Manetti focuses his refutation of Innocent on an etymological quibble and a defense of the body as the beautiful receptacle of the soul, Bonincontri and Pontano reject Innocent's premise that labor is a punishment. Bonincontri and Pontano, drawing from the anthropologies in Lucretius and Manilius, not only stress man's ability to overcome initial hardships but also emphasize the importance of labor and experimentation in his development.⁵⁴ For Bonincontri and Pontano, then, labor is not lamented but rather celebrated as the means for man to triumph over his initial condition. As several scholars have pointed out,⁵⁵ in book one of *Urania*, Pontano describes the birth of man in a fashion similar to Lucretius: "Ultimus erupit gravida tellure creatus/ Spe puer ingenti, sed corpore debilis ipso,/ Nudus, inops, quem dura solo suscepit egestas" ("a child burst forth from the pregnant earth with great hope but weak in the body itself, naked, helpless, whom harsh need took up from the earth").⁵⁶ Despite man's initial impediments, Pontano qualifies his condition with the optimistic phrase "with great hope" (*spe ingenti*),⁵⁷ thus adumbrating man's ultimate triumph over his condition. Man learns by necessity and by observing animals how to compensate for these difficulties and to acquire food and shelter. Pontano praises man's ability to adapt to his environment and to overcome all obstacles through time, hard work, and experience: "Ipsa dies, multusque labor docuere colendo/ Naturum in melius formare et pervigil usus" ("time itself, much hard work, and ever-watchful experience taught mankind by cultivating to shape nature for the better").⁵⁸ Labor is no longer a means of punishment, but the condition that brings about the best qualities of man. In fact, in book three of

remedies for our infirmity, weakness, and fragility, as we have said above"). Ibid., 4.25. The reference to Cicero is from *Tusculan Disputations* 5.1.3.

⁵³ *De dignitate* 4.22–25.

⁵⁴ Valla in his *De voluptate* and Facio in *De excellentia* both stress the importance of labor and experience; for example, in *De excellentia*, Facio views mankind's trials and tribulations as exercises and corrections of virtue (*Urb. lat.* 227, 160r–v). Unlike Valla and Facio, however, Bonincontri's and Pontano's focus is not on man's reward in the next life but rather the rewards of his labors in improving his earthly existence.

⁵⁵ Charlotte Goddard, "Pontano's Use of the Didactic Genre: Rhetoric, Irony and the Manipulation of Lucretius in *Urania*," 253–55; Yasmin Haskell, "Renaissance Latin Didactic Poetry on the Stars: Wonder, Myth, and Science."

⁵⁶ *Urania* 1.1127–30.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1.1127.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 1.1139–40.

De rebus naturalibus et divinis, Bonincontri identifies his Golden Age with the age when Jupiter introduces the arts and closes out the wild and lawless age of Saturn.⁵⁹

The Role of Knowledge

A second focal point of debate, the role of knowledge in man's development, is closely related to these ideas about man's initial condition. If, for example, man's capacities are severely limited from the outset, the extent to which knowledge can be used in a positive and constructive way is thus similarly restricted. A limited cognitive ability, then, can negatively affect the extent to which man can change or improve his own condition. It can hamper his progress, either as an individual or collectively as a society. Finally, the limits of man's intelligence will help to determine whether or not technological progress necessitates moral decline.

Proponents of the "misery of man" school emphasize the futility of knowledge and the attendant evils of technological progress. For example, Innocent stresses man's inherent mental limitations to point to the vanity of the pursuit of knowledge:

Licet enim oporteat indagantem multis insudare vigiliis et invigilare sudoribus, vix tamen est quidquam tam vile, vix est tam facile, quod ad plenum intelligat homo et comprehendat ad liquidum, nisi forsan illud perfecte sciat quod nichil scitur perfecte.⁶⁰

In comparison to God's understanding, man's comprehension can never be complete. Given all of mankind's mental and physical limitations and the inevitable struggle and attendant sorrow, Innocent comes to the conclusion that humans should cease searching for knowledge in the world and turn their efforts inward: "Deficient ergo scrutantes scrutinio, quoniam accedet homo ad cor altum et exaltabitur Deus . . . Qui magis intelligit, magis dubitat, et ille videtur plus sapere, qui plus desipit" ("Let the investigators therefore cease in their search; since man will come to the depths of his heart and God will be exalted . . . He who knows more, doubts

⁵⁹ *DRND* II.3.749–65.

⁶⁰ *De miseria* 1.12.2. "For although the searcher after truth must sweat in much sleeplessness and be awake in many exertions, nevertheless there is scarcely anything so low or so easy that man would thoroughly grasp or fully understand, except perhaps that which should be known perfectly: that nothing is known perfectly."

more, and that man seems to know more, who is more foolish").⁶¹ Innocent not only questions the value of man's various occupations but also the value of progress. Technological achievement comes at the expense of moral development.

While Innocent's view of the attendant evils in progress is again related to the Fall of man, his sentiments have their counterpart in ancient writers, particularly in accounts of the declining ages of man. Just as the condition of man changed from spontaneous abundance to one of labor and oppressing need, so also does the nature of man deteriorate from the innocence of the Golden Age to the base desires of the Iron Age. Like Virgil and Ovid's condemnation of the violence and "love of acquisition" (*amor habendi*, a phrase used by Virgil at *Aeneid* 8.327 and by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* 1.131) that are characteristic of the classical Iron Age, Pope Innocent similarly criticizes the base motivations of man's pursuits: money, glory, or power.⁶²

Tria maxime solent homines affectare: opes, voluptates, honores. De opibus prava, de voluptatibus turpia, de honoribus vana procedunt . . . Opes generant cupiditates et avaritiam, voluptates pariunt gulam et luxuriam, honores nutriunt superbiam et iactantiam.⁶³

For Innocent, knowledge is not only futile but also morally treacherous. Innocent rejects man's entire earthly existence. For Innocent, man's only hope for the next life is to emerge unscathed from the allurements of the devil and the enticements of the senses.

To counter Innocent's disparagement of knowledge, the humanists praise art. While conceding man's limitations with respect to the brevity of life and his individual capacity, they enumerate the manifold pleasures and benefits that knowledge has bestowed on man. Building on the works of Petrarch and Facio,⁶⁴ Manetti articulates a humanistic vision of

⁶¹ Ibid., 1.12.3.

⁶² Ibid., 1.13.1–2.

⁶³ Ibid., 2.1.1. "Men are accustomed especially to pursue three things: riches, pleasures, honors. Wicked things come from riches; disgraceful things from pleasures; empty things from honors . . . Riches bring forth desires and avarice; pleasure produce gluttony and extravagance; honors nourish pride and boasting." Innocent draws especially in this passage upon 1 John 2: 16. For more on how medieval literature and the misery of man tradition reacts to the lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and the pride of life (1 John 2: 16), see Donald Howard, "The Contempt of the World: A Study in the Ideology of Latin Christendom, with Emphasis on Fourteenth Century English Literature"; idem, *The Three Temptations: Medieval Man in Search of the World*.

⁶⁴ Petrarch *De remediis* 2.93; Facio *De foelicitate*, Urb. lat. 227, 128v, *De excellentia*, Urb. lat. 227, 156r–157r.

mankind in which man uses the divine part of his nature, his mind, to take advantage of the provisions of Nature and Providence to improve his condition on earth and to earn rewards for the next life.

While Petrarch and Facio had praised the mind of man for its ability to compensate for the body's external needs and for its capacity to understand God and practice virtue, respectively, Manetti elaborates on their encomium of man's intellect by expounding at great length on the creative and cognitive power of the mind. After distinguishing between the three powers of the mind: the intellect, the memory, and the will,⁶⁵ Manetti narrates the intellect's manifold contributions to mankind throughout history, including contemporary figures alongside mythological and historical inventors from classical and biblical antiquity.⁶⁶ Manetti praises man's ingenuity, his industry, his skill, and his cleverness (*ingenium, industria, ars, and sollertia*) in his discovery and mastery of the arts, ranging from the mechanical and fine arts to the political and theoretical arts. He celebrates in particular⁶⁷ three marvels in the history of man: the creation of the first ship, the *Argo*; Brunelleschi's dome for the cathedral in Florence; and Archimedes's celestial sphere (or planetarium), which demonstrated the different movements of the moon, the sun, and the five planets. Later in book three, Manetti attributes the creation of the civilized world to man, beautifying, adorning, and refining God's creation:

Quid vero de subtili et acuto eius tam pulchri et tam formosi hominis ingenio dicemus, quod equidem tantum et tale est, ut cuncta queque post primam illam novam ac rudem mundi creationem ex singulari quodam et precipuo humane mentis acumine a nobis adinventata ac confecta et absoluta fuisse videantur? . . . Hec quidem et cetera huiusmodi tot ac talia undique conspiciuntur, ut mundus et cuncta eius ornamenta ab omnipotenti deo ad usus hominum primo inventa institutaque et ab ipsis postea hominibus gratanter accepta multo pulchriora multoque ornatiores ac longe politiores effecta fuisse videantur.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Manetti draws upon the conception of man in Genesis 1:26, man made in the image and likeness of God. See also Petrarch, *De remediis* 2.93, *Urb. lat.* 334, 229v and Facio, *De excellentia, Urb. lat.* 227, 153r.

⁶⁶ *De dignitate* 2.36–44.

⁶⁷ Manetti signifies the importance of these events in his history by the rare use of three consecutive supines: *incredibile dictu* (*ibid.*, 2.37), *incredibile dictu* (2.38), and *mirabile dictu* (2.43).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.20–21. "What shall we say in truth about the subtle and sharp ingenuity of his so beautiful and so shapely man, which indeed is so great and such that all things, which were after that first, new, and crude creation of the world, seem to have been discovered, constructed, and completed by us out of some singular and especial acumen of the human mind? . . . Indeed these things and other things of this kind are everywhere seen to be so

Manetti thus celebrates mankind's ability to act and to understand (*agere et intelligere*)⁶⁹ in accordance with the divine part of himself and in imitation of his own creator.⁷⁰

Despite his glorification of mankind's achievements in response to the larger misery of man tradition, Manetti only briefly mentions the advantages of the mind in his reply to Innocent and instead, repeats many of Facio's arguments about the resurrection of bodies at the end of time and the rewards of the blessed in the next life.⁷¹ For example, to Innocent's list of bodily and mental miseries, Manetti responds that man has as many, if not more, pleasures as a result of his pursuits, and that all bodily impediments are rendered void at the resurrection of bodies at the end of time.⁷² Manetti also posits that man must have lived longer at the beginning of civilization in order to discover and develop all the necessities of life.⁷³ Although his treatise ends with a religious focus that dwells on the joys of the blessed and the punishments of the damned,⁷⁴ Manetti articulates a vision of man that stresses the creative and cognitive power of his mind both to serve his needs on earth as well as to prepare him for the life to come.

Bonincontri and Pontano take the argument against Innocent's position in a direction altogether different from that of Manetti. Manetti focuses

many and such a kind that the world and all its ornaments seem to have been discovered and established in the beginning by all-powerful God for the use of men and afterwards gratefully received by men and made much more beautiful, much more adorned, and by far more refined."

⁶⁹ "Itaque non iniuria agere et intelligere proprium ipsius solius hominis officium fore dicemus" ("And so we will say not wrongly that to act and to understand will be the exclusive duty of man alone"). Ibid., 3.46. See also 4.53, 73. See Vespasiano da Bisticci's life of Manetti, in Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Vite di Uomini Illustri del Secolo XV*, ed. Paolo D'Ancona and Erhard Aeschlimann (Milan: U. Hoepli, 1951), 259–91; idem, *Renaissance Princes, Popes, and Prelates: The Vespasiano Memoirs: Lives of Illustrious Men of the XVth Century*, trans. William George and Emily Waters (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 372–395. For more on Manetti's use of this theme of man, see Eugene Rice, *The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 47–48; Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, 424–25; Eugenio Garin, *Italian Humanism*, 59.

⁷⁰ "Unde qui hec et cetera huiusmodi conspexisse putantur, hi profecto docuisse perhibentur similem animum suum eius esse qui ea sive in celo sive in terra sive in mari totove mundo fabricatus esset" ("Whence those men who are thought to have observed these things and other things of this kind, these men surely are said to have taught that their mind was similar to the mind of He who had fashioned these things whether in heaven or on earth or in the sea or in the whole world"). *De dignitate* 2.44.

⁷¹ See especially, Facio *De excellentia, Urb. lat.* 227, 160v–169r.

⁷² *De dignitate* 4.22, 57–58.

⁷³ Ibid., 4.54.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 4.58–71.

on the pleasures of knowledge and vindicates the body. Bonincontri and Pontano, however, draw on classical anthropologies, particularly those of Lucretius and Manilius, to emphasize the importance of knowledge in both the individual progress and the collective progress of man over time. They respond to the challenge posed by individual cognitive limitations by stressing both the collaborative and collective effort of man over time. They also emphasize the experimental nature of the acquisition of knowledge. Bonincontri and Pontano narrate the ways in which knowledge has brought civilization to barbarity and mankind closer to God.⁷⁵ In the second book of *De rebus naturalibus et divinis*, Bonincontri describes the euhemeristic myth of Endymion as the first astronomer to ascend to divine knowledge.⁷⁶ Bonincontri's Endymion is part inspired philosopher and part scientist. Endymion's love for the moon drives him to track her every movement without sleep and through hazardous conditions. He gains real knowledge, however, only after thirty years of careful observation and hard work.⁷⁷ Endymion may be the first astronomer, but he is certainly not the last. He leads the way for others to follow. Bonincontri says: "Haec via sublimis animos ad sidera vexit" ("This path has carried exalted minds to the stars").⁷⁸ Endymion's extraordinary physical and mental exertion in pursuit of knowledge does not result in exasperation and misery, as it would in the world according to Pope Innocent. Rather Bonincontri's Endymion achieves understanding and fulfillment through his work, his labor. Although Bonincontri (and Pontano along with him) concedes that progress is not morally ambivalent or unequivocally good, he stresses the positive contributions that knowledge brings to man and to society over time, thus echoing the positive idea of progress in Lucretius and Manilius.

Pontano directly addresses the moral question of technological progress in book one of *Urania*, when God the "opifex," the creator, relates the prophecy of mankind before his creation to a council of assembled gods. Pontano, through the voice of God, attributes all positive aspects of man's development to the divine part of mankind: it is the divine part of man that founds cities, establishes law, and lives honestly.⁷⁹ In this way, Pontano clearly assigns responsibility: all good is from God, all evil is man's

⁷⁵ *DRND* II.3.759–65; *Urania* 1.955–67.

⁷⁶ *DRND* II.2.151–90.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.153–82.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.183.

⁷⁹ *Urania* 1.955–67.

own making. In narrating man's actual development at the end of book one, Pontano stresses man's invention of the arts for the common good, and the importance of society and its institutions in the development of man. Thus, for Bonincontri and Pontano, the active pursuit of knowledge through time, hard work, and experience not only provides fulfillment and pleasure for the individual but also allows mankind as a whole to triumph over his condition.

Bonincontri's and Pontano's emphasis on the collaborative aspect of progress and on knowledge acquired through experimentation is based upon the anthropologies in Lucretius and Manilius. While admitting that technological progress is fraught with moral complications, Lucretius ends his anthropology in book five with the triumph of civilization:

Usus et impigrae simul experientia mentis
paulatim docuit pedetemptim progredientis.
Sic unumquicquid paulatim protrahit aetas
in medium ratioque in luminis erigit oras;
namque alid ex alio clarescere corde videbant,
artibus ad summum donec venere cacumen.⁸⁰

Manilius similarly expresses an optimistic progress of mankind both in his anthropology in book one and again at the end of book four.⁸¹ For Manilius, man's destiny lies in his constant pursuit of knowledge,⁸² and progress as a society is dependent on the collective effort of men over time:

Sed cum longa dies acuit mortalia corda
et labor ingenium miseris dedit et sua quemque
advigilare sibi iussit fortuna premendo,
seducta in varias certarunt pectora curas
et, quodcumque sagax temptando repperit usus,
in commune bonum commentum laeta dederunt.⁸³

⁸⁰ *DRN* 5.1452–57. "All these [arts] as men progressed gradually step by step were taught by practice and the experiments of the active mind. So by degrees time brings up before us every single thing, and reason lifts it into the precincts of light. For they saw one thing after another grow clear in their minds, until they attained the highest pinnacle of the arts." The English translation is from *De rerum natura*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁸¹ *Astronomica* 1.66–112, 4.866–932.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 4.901–10

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1.79–84. "But long ages sharpened human wits, the struggle for survival endowed those wretched folk with ingenuity, and the burden of each man's lot forced him to look to himself to better it: then they took thought to divide their tasks and vied with each other in performing them, and whatever discovery shrewd experience had found by trial, they

Lucretius and Manilius, like Bonincontri and Pontano, celebrate man's reason and ingenuity to overcome all obstacles with time, hard work, and experience.

The humanist debate over the nature and condition of man not only had its predecessors in the Middle Ages and even further back in antiquity but also influenced and helped shape the emerging conceptions of man in the sixteenth century. The humanists' praise of man's creative power, labor, and experiential knowledge influenced ideas about the conception of man in the works of Bruno and Campanella. Innocent III's pessimistic portrayal of man still had its advocates in the Renaissance, and went on to gain considerable ground in the Reformation. Luther's and Calvin's harsh criticism of man, stressing both his impotence and ignorance, not only echo the sentiments expressed by Innocent III but also respond directly to the humanists' praise of man's freedom and infinite intellectual potential.⁸⁴ The celebratory rhetoric of many humanists has, at times, been overstated by scholars such as Burckhardt and Cassirer,⁸⁵ in order to shape a larger picture of what defines the Renaissance. Nevertheless, there remains in the works of many humanists evidence of a firm belief in man's ability to improve his own condition and his society through art. Drawing upon the anthropologies of Lucretius and Manilius, Bonincontri and Pontano celebrate the role of labor in man's triumph over his condition and the importance of knowledge in man's individual and social development. By emphasizing the acquisition of knowledge through experimentation and the collaborative endeavor not only of a few wise men who lead the way and vie with each other for the common good, but also of a society over time, they adumbrate the mission of Francis Bacon's Salomon's House along with the core principles of the New Science.

joyfully surrendered to the common weal." The English translation is from *Astronomica*, trans. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁸⁴ Ficino in his *Platonic Theology* and Pico in his *Oratio* celebrated man's freedom and unique status among all creation.

⁸⁵ Jakob Burckhardt, *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien: ein Versuch* (Basel: Schweig-hauser, 1860); Ernst Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1927).

SEBASTIAN CASTELLIO'S DOCTRINE OF TOLERANCE BETWEEN THEOLOGICAL DEBATE AND MODERNITY¹

Stefania Salvadori

Scholars have long celebrated the role Sebastian Castellio² played in the heated debate on tolerance following the execution of the Spanish heretic Michael Servetus³ in 1553,⁴ especially on two counts: first, for his defence of the freedom of human conscience; second, for his appeal to reason as a privileged instrument of investigation.⁵ Both are generally cited as proofs of the innovation and modernity of Castellio's thought, harbingers of the century of reason and method that was to follow.⁶

¹ This essay is dedicated to my teacher, Professor Emidio Campi, to whom I owe a special debt of gratitude: "Praeceptoribus autem eximiam debemus gratiam, quod sicut per parentis contigit ut vivamus, ita per hos contigit ut bene vivamus, et quemadmodum illis corporis vitam ferimus acceptam, ita his debemus animi vitam."

² Among the traditional analyses of Castellio, see Ferdinand Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion, sa vie et son œuvre (1515–1563). Étude sur les origines du protestantisme libéral français* (Paris: Hachette, 1892; reprint, Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1964); Hans Rudolf Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio 1515–1563. Humanist und Verteidiger der religiösen Toleranz im konfessionellen Zeitalter* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1997).

³ The literature on Michael Servetus is extensive. A brief overview as well as references to relevant works can be found in Jerome Friedman, *Michael Servetus. A Case Study in Total Heresy* (Geneva: Droz, 1978); and Valentine Zuber, *Les conflits de la tolérance. Michel Servet entre mémoire et histoire* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004).

⁴ For a historical introduction, see Uwe Plath, *Calvin und Basel in den Jahren 1552–1556* (Basel-Stuttgart: Theologischer Verlag, 1974). For an overview of both Castellio's and Servetus's way of thinking, see Roland Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951); idem, *Hunted Heretic: The Life and Death of Michael Servetus: 1511–1553* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953); and *Autour de Michel Servet et Sébastien Castellion*, ed. Bruno Becker (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1953).

⁵ Cf. Hans Rudolf Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio im Urteil seiner Nachwelt von Späthumanismus bis zur Aufklärung* (Basel-Stuttgart: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1956); Roland Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty*, 29; Charles Emile Delormeau, *Sébastien Castellion. Apôtre de la Tolérance et de la Liberté de Conscience* (Neuchâtel: Messeiler, 1964).

⁶ See, for instance, Alain Dufour, "La notion de liberté chez les Réformateurs," in *La liberté de conscience (XVI^e–XVII^e siècles). Actes du Colloques du Mulhouse et Bâle (1989)*, ed. H. R. Guggisberg, F. Lestringant and J. C. Margolin (Geneva: Droz, 1991): 15–20; Johannes Lindelbloom, "La place de Castellion dans l'histoire de l'esprit," in *Autour de Michel Servet et Sébastien Castellion*, 158–180.

While this assessment of Castellio's modernity is valid from the broad perspective of the history of ideas,⁷ it bypasses the historiographic question as to whether the connection he posited between tolerance and freedom of conscience could be immediately translated into those terms that it acquired during the Modern Age.⁸ In other words, can the freedom of human conscience which we associate with modernity be seen as an achievement of sixteenth-century culture, notwithstanding that culture's theological parameters? If the individual was not yet seen as independent of God and of his action in the world, what value could Castellio's contemporaries attribute to his defence of the liberty of conscience? As Kaegi noted some time ago,⁹ Castellio's conceptual vocabulary reflects the theological *forma mentis* of the environment in which he wrote. It was precisely through the traditional paradigm of *concordia*,¹⁰ however, that Castellio introduced a radical change in perspective that would progressively distance him from Reformed orthodoxy and from his main opponent, John Calvin.

The present study seeks to shed new light on the famous debate between Calvin and Castellio by interpreting it as a discussion of the inability of human conscience to access God's truth and thereby distinguish the dangerous heretic—who denies the *veritas* he knows—from the unorthodox believer—who interprets the *veritas* he knows imperfectly. In light of both authors' understandings of the truth essential for salvation during their first debate on tolerance in 1553–1554, Castellio does not appear to oppose Calvin's paradigm of *concordia per se*, but rather his interpretation of it based on the equation of "comprehensible" with "indispensable for salvation," in which "comprehensible" does not mean "believed," as it does

⁷ I refer here to that field of research in intellectual history started by Lovejoy's work that deals with the expression and change of human ideas over time. See Bevir Mark, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁸ Hans Rudolf Guggisberg, "The Defence of Religious Toleration and Religious Liberty in Early Modern Europe: Arguments, Pressures, and Some Consequences," *History of European Ideas* 4 (1983): 37–50.

⁹ Werner Kaegi, "Castellio und die Anfänge der Toleranz, Gedenkrede gehalten am 19. Juli 1953," *Basler Universitätsreden*, 32. Heft (1953), 18.

¹⁰ For discussion of conceptual differences between *concordia* and *tolerance*, see Mario Turchetti, *Concordia o tolleranza? François Bauduin (1520–1573) e i "Moyenneurs"* (Geneva: Droz, 1971); idem, "Une question mal posée: Erasme et la tolérance. L'idée de synkatabasis," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 53 (1991): 379–395; idem, "Réforme et tolérance, un binôme polysémique," in *Tolérance et Réforme. Éléments pour une généalogie du concept de tolérance*, ed. N. Piqué and G. Waterlot (Paris-Montreal: L'Harmattan, 1999), 9–29; Carlos Gilly, "Sebastiano Castellione, l'idea di tolleranza e l'opposizione alla politica di Filippo II," *Rivista Storica Italiana* 110 (1998): 144–165.

for Reformed Orthodoxy, but grasped by reason, the child of God.¹¹ Castellio thus proposes an original connection between faith and knowledge in his last treatise, *De Arte Dubitandi*, in order to both ground his doctrine of tolerance and to legitimate doubt and ignorance without denying the saving power of God's truth.

Tolerance and Truth in Calvin's Defensio orthodoxae fidei

Castellio is generally regarded not only as one of Calvin's most well known adversaries, but also as the premier advocate of freedom of conscience in defiance of Calvin's reactionary theocracy.¹² This perception may reflect a traditional historiographic current that identifies the peculiarity of the sixteenth-century heretical movement with its irreducibility to the dogmatic framework of both Rome and the Reformed Churches.¹³ Though the distance between Castellio and Calvin is undeniably great, we would do well to consider whether this distance is based on content—such as the contrast between the paradigm of *concordia*, which aims at the restoration of unity out of diverse opinions, and that of *tolerantia*, i.e. the “freedom of conscience” paradigm, which allows for the coexistence of such diversity—or a difference in methods designed to achieve the same goal—namely, the unity of believers within the true Church. We may begin by recalling the origins of their most famous debate.¹⁴

In the summer of 1553, a Spanish humanist named Michael Servetus fled from Italy to Geneva, having been condemned of heresy in Vienna in February of the same year. He was attending a sermon by Calvin, with whom he had had a lengthy correspondence on theological matters from 1546 to 1548, when he was recognized and imprisoned on August 13. Condemned once again for his rejection of the Trinity and infant baptism, the Spanish heretic was sentenced to death on October 24 and burned

¹¹ Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi et confidenti, ignorandi et sciendi*, ed. E. Feist (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 65.

¹² See, for instance, Hans Martin Stükelberger, “Calvin und Castellio” *Zwingliana* 7 (1939): 91–128; and Carla Gallicet Calvetti, *Sebastien Castellion. Il riformato umanista contro il riformatore Calvino. Per una lettura filosofico-teologica dei Dialogi IV postumi di Castellion* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1989).

¹³ George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962); Delio Cantimori, *Eretici italiani del Cinquecento* (Florence: Sansoni, 1939; reprint, with an introduction by Adriano Prosperi, Turin: Einaudi, 2002).

¹⁴ My definition here is strongly influenced by the terminological debate initiated by Mario Turchetti. See n. 9.

at the stake five days later. The historical facts of Servetus's case and the debate on tolerance which arose after his death are well known:¹⁵ Calvin was seen as the tyrannical "Pope of Geneva" who routinely persecuted his adversaries by condemning them of heresy, while Castellio was regarded as the champion of tolerance towards suspected heretics. In order to provide a more nuanced account of both men's positions, it is necessary to consider those texts published after Servetus's condemnation. Calvin's justification of his sentence against the Spanish heretic would soon become the target of Castellio's lifelong polemic and the cornerstone of his theory of tolerance.

Compelled by his opponent and other Swiss theologians,¹⁶ Calvin explains the reasons for his condemnation of Servetus in his *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de sacra Trinitate*,¹⁷ published in January 1554 by Robert Hestienne.¹⁸ We read in the foreword of his *Defensio* that errors arise from human persistence in analysing holy mysteries that God the Father does not want all believers to understand. Such human insolence is particularly unacceptable among those who are gifted with analytical acumen, for they raise questions that are as tangled as they are futile. This was clearly the case of Servetus, we are told, who professed his non-Trinitarian doctrine with wicked conviction.

In response to the Spanish humanist and to all those who deny the clarity of Scripture in order to advance their foolish interpretations and appeal for tolerance towards heretics, Calvin asks how it is possible to uphold true religion, to recognize Holy Church and Christ Himself, without any unquestionable reference to Scripture. How could believers be kept from entering into a maze of doubt?¹⁹ In Calvin's opinion, there is no other alternative, since errors generate a false idea of God the Father,

¹⁵ For a historical overview, see Joseph Lecler, *Histoire de la tolérance au siècle de la Réforme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994 [first edition, Paris: Editions Montaigne, 1955]), 312–361; and Ferdinand Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion*, vol. 1, 293–413; vol. 2, 1–55.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Calvin's letters in *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. G. Baum, E. Cuniz, E. Reuss et al. (Braunschweig: C. A. Schwetschke, 1834–1860), 14, 121, 672; 683–684 (henceforth CO).

¹⁷ See Calvin's letter to Bullinger in CO 15, 124.

¹⁸ John Calvin, *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de sacra Trinitate contra prodigiosos errores Michaelis Serveti Hispani* (Geneva: per Robertus Stefanus, 1554, reprint, CO 36, 453–644). At the end of February, a French translation was printed: Jean Calvin, *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy qui tiennent tous Chrétiens de la Trinité de personnes en un seul Dieu* (Geneva: per Jean Crespin, 1554). Quotations in the following pages are from the original Latin edition.

¹⁹ John Calvin, *Defensio orthodoxae fidei*, 11–12.

which leads to idolatrous worship. From this point of view, heresy is not simply an incorrect interpretation, but a shameless blasphemy, especially when it denies the importance of Scripture and the foundations of true religion.²⁰ Even so, far from proposing a doctrinal standard to which all believers must conform, Calvin deplores the wickedness of all “papistae” or Roman Catholics, who sin in an opposite, but no less grievous manner, by binding individual conscience to human rituals and thus converting God’s Word—the heavenly shelter the Father offered to his children—into a yoke of tyranny.²¹

Well aware that these same accusations were being made against him, Calvin identifies spiritual freedom as the basis of the evangelical message, which is antithetical to all dominations of human laws and authorities.²² *Defensio orthodoxae fidei* thus confirms the value of the freedom of conscience, as the French theologian described it in the preface to his *Institution Chretienne*,²³ while at the same time affirming the need to preserve the integrity of the faith against the attacks of those who endanger its existence, the attacks of all those “Lucianicos et crassos Dei contemptores” (“disrespectful and vulgar disparagers of God”) who seek to delegitimize the condemnation of heretics by insisting on the elusiveness of certain oracles of Scripture. In this way, they manage to conceal the *veritas divina* under so many veils and to prevent believers from recognizing the Church of Christ.²⁴

The contradiction between Calvin’s condemnation of errors as blasphemy and his praise of freedom of conscience is more apparent than real. As he sees it, freedom of conscience lies at the heart of the Gospels,

²⁰ Ibid., 39–40, quotations from Ex. 32:29 ff and Dt. 13:7. Cf. John Calvin, *Institutio christianae religionis* 4.20.10.

²¹ John Calvin, *Defensio orthodoxae fidei*, 34.

²² Despite the legend of Calvin as an intolerant and reactionary churchman, the French theologian considers freedom of conscience an essential requirement of Reformed doctrine, as has been well documented by Pierre-François Moreau, “Calvin et la tolerance,” in *Tolérance et Réforme. Éléments pour une généalogie du concept de tolérance*, ed. N. Piqué and G. Waterlot (Paris-Montreal: L’Harmattan, 1999): 31–43. See also Ghislain Waterlot, “Les roptures de l’ecclésiologie calvinienne: une origine de la tolérance moderne?” in *Tolérance et Réforme*, 45–70; and Christophe Strohm, “Calvin et la tolérance religieuse,” in *Calvin et le Calvinisme. Cinq siècles d’influences sur l’Eglise et la Société* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2008): 267–290.

²³ Jean Calvin, *Institution de la Religion Chrestienne*, dedicatory letter to the king of France, Francis I, reprint, CO 4.344–345.

²⁴ John Calvin, *Defensio orthodoxae fidei*, 11–12. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are the editors’.

but it means something other than the proper use of one's intellect.²⁵ The criterion he proposes for determining the meaning of Scripture is not its reasonableness to the mind, but an inner experience of its undeniable truth, which outstrips the rational power of believers and regenerates their hearts *sola fide*, transforming sinners into Christians.²⁶ In Calvin's *Defensio orthodoxae fidei*, it is precisely this connection between individual freedom and undeniable truth—between human interpretation and the protection of God's Word—that justifies the persecution of heretics.

According to the Genevan theologian, there is no doubt that the utmost care should be used in securing the true "cognitio Dei," for the Father ordered the Gospel to be spread by a spiritual sword alone. This does not, however, apply to apostates "qui se impie alienaverint a vero cultu Dei" ("those who impiously turned away from the true worship of God") since they seek to dispose of God's truth according to their opinion.²⁷ Therefore they not only can but *should* be severely punished by the magistrates:

Scimus enim tres esse errorum gradus [...]. Fideles saepius Paulus hortatur ut se invicem tolerant, quamvis aliqua sit inter eos dissensio: nempe si qua levis superstitio et inscitia simplicium mentes occupat, ut eam patientia corrigere potius studeant quam intemperanter ad vindictam efferveant. Secundum errorum genus etsi castigationem meretur, mediocris tamen adhibenda est severitas: tantum ne indulgentia alatur eorum improbitas et contumacia qui fidei unitatem scindere cuperent. Sed ubi a suis fundamentis convellitur religio, detestandae in Deum blasphemiae proferuntur, impiis et pestiferis dogmatibus in exitium rapiuntur animae, denique ubi palam defectio ab unico Deo puraque eius doctrina tentatur, ad extremum illud remedium descendere necesse est, ne mortale venenum longius serpat.²⁸

²⁵ The literature on the difference between freedom of conscience and free will in Protestant and Reformed orthodoxy is vast. A brief overview concerning Luther's and Calvin's doctrine can be found in Ernst Wolf, "Von Problem des Gewissens in reformatorischer Sicht," in Ernst Wolf, *Peregrinatio. Studien zur reformatorischen Theologie und zum Kirchenproblem* (Münich: Kaiser, 1962); William R. Stevenson, *Sovereign Grace: the Place and Significance of Christian Freedom in John Calvin's Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Christoph Dahling-Sander, *Zur Freiheit befreit: das theologische Verständnis von Freiheit und Befreiung nach Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, James H. Cone und Gustavo Gutierrez* (Frankfurt am Main: Lembeck, 2003).

²⁶ See Herbert F. Hahn, "The Reformation and Bible Criticism," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 21:4 (1953): 257–261.

²⁷ John Calvin, *Defensio orthodoxae fidei*, 12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 13. "We know that the degrees of the error are three. [...]. Paul urges the faithful to tolerate one another, even if some dissension occurs among them: naturally, if a mild superstition or ignorance occupies the simple-minded, they should be patiently corrected, rather than rashly judged. The second sort of error deserves punishment, although the severity of it should be moderate: such that indulgence does not nurture the wickedness and the audacity of those who strive to destroy the unity of the Church. However, when

For Calvin, the definition of an error in relation to the divine truth from which it differs lies at the center of the debate on tolerance. The degree of severity of any given error, and the punishment that it deserves, can be established based on the aspect of truth that it denies. More specifically, in the case of mild superstition, as advised by Paul,²⁹ the maximum tolerance should be used to correct those who err. Faced with the obstinacy that is jeopardizing the unity of the Church, the punishment shall be moderate, but firm. However, the denial of the *fundamenta fidei*, the basic principles of Christianity, merits no such indulgence. By attacking the honour of God and the essence of faith, such sacrilegious blasphemers³⁰ imperil the heavenly doctrine, and therefore the true Church, which is why they must be destroyed, even physically, in accordance with the law of the Old Testament.³¹

It is precisely in response to this argument that Castellio lays the groundwork for his theory of tolerance. What are the principles of that *sana doctrina christiana*, the denial of which amounts to blasphemy and therefore heresy? How are they to be determined? In his famous *De haereticis an sint persequendi*, which appeared in March 1544, Castellio offers his first reply.

Unnecessary Truth in De haereticis an sint persequendi

Three months after the publication of Calvin's *Defensio*, Castellio sent his pamphlet to press under the pseudonym Martinus Bellius, a false place of publication, and the following title: *De haereticis an sint persequendi et quomodo omnino sint cum eis agendum, Luther and Brentii aliquorumque multuorum tum veterum tum recentiorum sententiae*.³² At first glance,

the very foundations of religion itself are attacked and detestable blasphemies against God are uttered, when souls are dragged into ruin through impious and pernicious dogmas and an open rebellion ensues against the one God and his pure doctrine, it is necessary to resort to that extreme remedy, so that that mortal poison does not spread for long."

²⁹ Rom. 15:1; Gal. 6:1–6; Eph. 4:19.

³⁰ On blasphemy as intolerable abjuration in patristic and medieval theology, see Joseph Lecler, *Histoire de la tolérance*, 42–157.

³¹ John Calvin, *Defensio orthodoxae fidei*, 39–40.

³² Sebastian Castellio, *De haereticis an sint persequendi, et omnino quomodo sint cum eis agendum, Luteri et Brentii aliquorumque multuorum tum veterum tum recentiorum sententiae. Liber hoc tam turbolento tempore pernecessarius, et cum omnibus, tum potissimum principibus et magistratibus utilissimus, ad discendum, quondam sit eorum in re tam controversa, tacque periculosa, officium* (Magdeburg: per Georgium Rausch, 1554). Quotations in the following pages are from Sebastian Castellio, *De haereticis an sint persequendi*,

the booklet is nothing more than a collection of texts by well known authors³³—among them, Luther and Brenz, quoted in the title, as well as Calvin³⁴—none of whom ventured beyond the defence of the freedom of conscience to protect the sovereignty of the Christian faith, its exemption from all laws and human works. Although the death penalty is unilaterally rejected, even under the most extreme circumstances of religious error, stubborn blasphemers who deny the most fundamental truths of the Christian faith are to be excommunicated from the Church and sent into exile. The work's ultimate goal—both in the prefaces of Martin Bellius and in the excerpts of Georgius Kleinburg and Basilius Montfort, all Castellio's pseudonyms³⁵—remains *concordia*, the reconciliation of Christians within one church on the grounds of its *fundamenta fidei*, that is, its saving truth.³⁶

From this point of view, Castellio is directed towards the same end as Calvin and Reformed orthodoxy: the restoration of unity among believers.³⁷ And yet the treatise has come to be seen as one of the first modern formulations of tolerance in the history of European culture. The immediate scandal it provoked in the Reformed Churches seems only to confirm its deviancy from the canons of orthodoxy.

As I hope to show in the pages that follow, although Castellio accepts the classical ideal of *concordia*, he differs from Calvin radically in the method he envisions for its achievement. Specifically, he redefines the

ed. Sape van der Woude (Geneva: Droz, 1954). Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of Castellio's works are from Sebastian Castellio, *Concerning Heretics: Whether They Are to Be Persecuted and How They Are to Be Treated*, ed. and trans. Roland Bainton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935).

³³ An overview of the historical context and a short introduction to the work can be found in Uwe Plath, *Calvin und Basel*, 128–138; Joseph Lecler, *Histoire de la tolérance*, 322–331; Ferdinand Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion*, vol. 1, 360–413; Hans Rudolf Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio 1515–1563*, 89–106.

³⁴ Luther's quotations are from *Von weltlicher Uberkeytt, wie weyt man yhr gehorsam schuldigsey* (1523). Calvin's quotations are from his commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (1522) and from the first edition of *Institutio Christianae Religionis* (1536). See Hans Rudolf Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio 1515–1563*, 89–94.

³⁵ On the attribution of Kleinberg's text to David Joris instead of to Castellio, see Mirjam van Veen, "Contaminated with David Joris's blasphemies. David Joris's contribution to Castellio's *De Haereticis an sint persequendi*," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 69:2 (2007): 313–326.

³⁶ See, for instance, Bellius's and Kleinberg's texts in Sebastian Castellio, *De haereticis an sint persequendi*, 6–9 and 153–156.

³⁷ Michael Becht, *Pium consensum tueri. Studien zum Begriff 'consensus' im Werk von Erasmus von Rotterdam, Philipp Melanchthon und Johannes Calvin* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2000).

truth required for salvation through a reduction of the *prima principia* used to establish agreement among Christians and, consequently, through an enlargement of the faith's *adiaphora*, the domain of what believers can ignore or doubt. According for the Savoyard humanist, the foundation of tolerance means mapping a new "geography" of God's truth, which allows believers to recognize what should be known, ignored, doubted or believed in Holy Scripture.³⁸

In the preface of the Latin edition of *De haereticis an sint persequendi*, addressed to Duke Christopher of Württemberg, Martin Bellius raises two fundamental issues. The discussion focuses first on the difficulties concerning the definition of *veritas*, the denial of which is to be severely punished. The countless struggles and persecutions that plague Christianity reveal a general predisposition to subject all doctrines of faith, even the most complex, to interminable debates in which each interpretation is presented not simply as an acceptable alternative, but as the only accurate understanding of the Gospel.³⁹ The words of these guardians of orthodoxy are not only empty, but potentially catastrophic, as evidenced by the wars and persecutions that ravage Europe. In the midst of their doctrinal disputes, they forget the moderation and the gentleness of Christ. They condemn those who simply disagree with their opinions, despite Paul's definition of heresy as obstinate opposition against God's Word, rejection of evidence of faith, and persistence in manifest error (Tit. 3:10).⁴⁰

However, asks Martin Bellius, i.e., Castellio, is it always clear how to distinguish true from false opinions in matters of religion? Are not believers and even theologians, as human beings, often forced to make assumptions, *doxai*, which must of course be consistent with the essence of Scripture, but cannot exceed the limits of human interpretation? If human opinions are a clear expression of divine truth, how are we to account for constant warfare and other forms of conflict that annihilate human relations, even among theologians? For Castellio, the answer lies in the ambiguity of Scripture itself. No single interpretation can be made of the *oracula Dei*, of the *mysteria*, of all those instances in which divine truth is expressed in an obscure and incomprehensible manner.⁴¹ In *De haereticis an sint*

³⁸ Background for this and the following paragraphs on *De Arte Dubitandi* can be found in Stefania Salvadori, *Sebastiano Castellione e la ragione della tolleranza* (Milan: Mimesis, 2009).

³⁹ Sebastian Castellio, *De haereticis an sint persequendi*, 3–4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 12–13. Cf. Sebastian Castellio, *Contra libellum Calvini* (Amsterdam, 1612), article 129: *Quid fit haereticus et quonam modo tractandus* (page numbers are absent in the Latin text).

persequendi, the consequences of this situation are immediately deduced: unable to seize the truth, obliged to advance possible interpretations but not irrefutable judgements, believers should abandon the search for doctrinal accuracy concerning all controversial issues in order to achieve consensus on the essentials of Christianity, namely the example of Christ's charity.⁴²

From this point of view, scholars have repeatedly noted that Martin Bellius's preface—and *De haereticis* as a whole—belongs to the Erasmian tradition and its *philosophia Christi*, giving preference to ethical practice over doctrinal formulations⁴³ and redefining heresy itself.⁴⁴ But we must also note the change of perspective that takes place within this text. In order to ground his doctrine of tolerance, Castellio introduces an essential distinction between the truth required to gain salvation and that which believers can ignore or misinterpret without incurring divine punishment:

Item de trinitate, de praedestinatione, de libero arbitrio, de Deo, de angelis, de statu animarum post hanc vitam, & caeteris huiusmodi rebus: quae neque ad salutem per fidem obtinendam usque adeo cognitu necessariae sunt (siquidem sine earum cognitione salvi facti sunt publicani & meretrices) neque conosci possunt antequam cor mundum habeamus (siquidem illa videre, est Deum ipsum videre, qui sine mundo corde videri non potest. iuxta illud: Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt) neque si sciantur, reddunt hominem meliorem, cum dixerit Paulus: si sciam omnia mysteria, et charitatem non habeam, nihil sum.⁴⁵

Castellio seeks to trace the *fundamenta fidei* back to the announcement of Christ as "Filium Dei, mundi iudicem ac Dominum" ("the Son of God,

⁴² Sebastian Castellio, *De haereticis an sint persequendi*, 11.

⁴³ See Roland Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty*, 114; idem, "Sebastian Castellio, Champion of Religious Liberty", in *Castellioniana, Quatre Études sur Sébastien Castellion et l'idée de la Tolérance*, ed. R. Bainton, B. Becker, M. Valkhoff and S. van der Woude (Leiden: Brill, 1951), 56–57.

⁴⁴ See Hans Rudolf Guggisberg, "‘Ich hasse die Ketzer’: Der Ketzerbegriff Sebastian Castellios und seine Situation in Basler Exil," in *Ketzerverfolgung im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, ed. S. Seidel Menchi (Wiessbaden: Wolfenbütteler Forschungen, Band 51, In Kommission bei Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), 249–265.

⁴⁵ Sebastian Castellio, *De haereticis an sint persequendi* 5–6. "With regard to the Trinity, predestination, free will; so, also, of God, the angels, the state of souls after this life and other like things, which do not need to be known for salvation by faith (for the publicans and sinners were saved without this knowledge), nor indeed can they be known before the heart is pure (for to see these things is to see God Himself, who cannot be seen save by the pure in heart, as the text says, 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.' Nor if these are known do they make a man better, as Paul says, 'Though I understand all mysteries and have not love it profiteth me nothing'"). *Concerning Heretics*, 122.

judge of the world and Lord") to the principles of the *correctio vitae*, since it is incumbent upon all Christians to understand and follow the "via, qua ad Christum veniri possit" ("the way by which we may come to Christ"), which is to correct our lives, but rather as to), the way that leads to Christ, in order to gain eternal salvation.⁴⁶ On the other hand, argues Martin Bellius, it is dangerous to talk about all other mysteries concerning God's truth, such as "de ipsius Christi statu & officio, ubi nam nun sit ipse Christus, quid agat, quomodo sedeat ad dexteram patris, quomodo sit unum cum patre" ("the state and office of Christ, where He now is and what He is doing, how he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and how He is one with the Father")⁴⁷ because it incites only violence and intolerance.

These remarks would not have amounted to anything new had Castellio not transgressed the traditional bounds of *adiaphora*, but this was not the case. Among the issues he considers uncertain, complex, and dangerous, he includes the doctrines of free will and of the Trinity, the latter of which Servetus himself had denied and for which he was executed. Moreover, the Savoyard humanist quotes the Gospel as he points out that publicans and prostitutes, "publicani et meretrices," saved their souls even if they remained ignorant of many mysteries⁴⁸—such as Predestination or the essence of God—demonstrating the truth of Bellius's theory. The fundamental topics of Reformed orthodoxy thus become *adiaphora*, or unnecessary to salvation. While subject to doubt or ignorance, they look forward, at least temporarily, to a new heavenly revelation.⁴⁹

The distinction between *fundamenta fidei*⁵⁰ and *adiaphora* thus defines a new model of theological *veritas* through the identification of "necessary to salvation" with "comprehensible." According to Castellio, this identity

⁴⁶ See Hans Rudolf Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio 1515–1563*, 96.

⁴⁷ Sebastian Castellio, *De haereticis an sint persequendi*, 4–5; *Concerning Heretics*, 122.

⁴⁸ Mt. 21:31–32.

⁴⁹ Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 49. See also, for example, Sebastian Castellio, *Biblia. Una cum eiusdem annotationibus* (Basel: per Johan Parcus – Oporinus, 1551): *Praefatio* Fll. 2r–v. On Castellio's chiliastic doctrine, see Steven Ozment, *Mysticism and Dissent: Religious Ideology and Social Protest in the Sixteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); and Marcelle Derwa, "L'influence de l'esprit irénique sur le contenu doctrinal de la pensée de Castellion," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 58 (1980): 355–381.

⁵⁰ *De haereticis an sint persequendi* identifies the *fundamenta fidei* and the ethical principles embodied by Christ. In the opening chapters of *De Arte Dubitandi*, Castellio includes among *prima principia* ethical rules as well as several fundamental features concerning God's essence. The latter may be summed up in God's existence, justice, and omnipotence: "Principio deum esse eundemque et mundi rectorem et iustum esse dicimus et ex iis tribus principiis caetera omnia, quae in animo habemus, demonstrare cogitamus" ("First of all we assert that God exists, that he rules the world and that he is just. From these three

is a self-evident truth. Since God opened the door to eternal life when he sent his Son to deliver humankind from the slavery of sin, there is no doubt that every believer can achieve it; otherwise God would feign infinite mercy, while excluding many from salvation.⁵¹ The Father provides only one condition: believers must grasp and follow his will, the “via, qua ad Christum veniri possit,” which has been made clear through Christ’s example. All that which God has not disclosed—above all, the Trinity—need not be known or believed, but accepted as a mystery to be ignored or doubted, to be interpreted or even misinterpreted. To be mistaken is not to curse God, “errare non est maledicere.”⁵² Against Calvin, Bellius argues that Servetus was not, in fact, a blasphemer. He never denied the existence of the Father; he simply professed a crude interpretation of his mysterious essence, of his incomprehensible relationship with the Son and the Holy Spirit. He never killed or acted contrary to Christ’s example; he simply made groundless assumptions regarding his divine nature, “de ipsius Christi statu & officio.” As a minister of the church, and as a Christian, Calvin was required to correct Servetus’s interpretation, not to sentence him to death; to save his soul, not to kill his body.⁵³

principles we intend to demonstrate all the others that we hold in our soul”). Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 15.

⁵¹ Ibid., 20. This thesis is supported extensively also in Sebastian Castellio, *De Praedestinatione scriptum . . . d D. Mart. Borrhaum*, in *Dialogi IIII* [. . .]. *Eiusdem opuscula quedam dignissima quorum inscriptiones vera pagella ostendet* (Aresdorfij: Theophil. Philadelph. [Basel: apud P. Perna], 1578): 335–336. On the publication of Castellio’s posthumous work entitled *Dialogi IV*, see Carlos Gilly, “Die Zensur von Castellios Dialogi quatuor durch die basler Theologen (1578),” in *Querdenken. Dissens und Toleranz im Wandel der Geschichte. Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Hans R. Guggisberg*, ed. M. Erbe (Mannheim: Palatium Verlag, 1996), 169–192.

⁵² Sebastian Castellio, *Contra libellum Calvini*, article 116.

⁵³ “Hominem occidere, non est doctrinam tueri, sed est hominem occidere. Cum Genevenses Servetum occiderunt, non doctrinam defenderunt, sed hominem occiderunt. Doctrinam tueri non est Magistratibus (quid gladio cum Doctrina?), sed doctoris. Doctorem autem tueri est Magistratus, sicut agricolam et fabrum et medium et coeteros contra injuriam tueri. Itaque si Calvinum occidere Servetus voluisset, recte Calvinum defendisset Magistratus. Sed cum rationibus et scriptis Servetus pugnaret, rationibus et scriptis repellendus erat” (“If one kills a man, he does not protect a doctrine; he simply kills a man. When the Genevans killed Servetus, they did not defend a doctrine, they killed a man. The protection of doctrine is not incumbent upon magistrates (what has the sword to do with doctrine?) but doctors of the Church. The protection of teachers is however incumbent upon magistrates, as is that of the farmer, the blacksmith, the mediator, and others. Thus if Servetus had wished to kill Calvin, the magistrate would properly have defended Calvin. But since Servetus fought with reason and with writings, he should have been opposed with reason and with writings”).

The theory Bellius advances, marked by the primacy of ethics over doctrinal formulation and the independence of conscience from human coercion, enjoins all Christians to recognize their ignorance, their inability to discern all aspects of divine truth.⁵⁴ However, in order to distinguish doubt and ignorance from a deficiency in human nature, Castellio grounds his doctrine of tolerance on a legitimization of all gnoseological procedures, through which believers should adapt their comprehension to the nuanced essence of divine truth. Doubt and ignorance are thus transformed into an “art of comprehension” which clashes both with the Catholic Church—in which the ecclesiastical *magisterium* bridges the gap between believers’ doubt or ignorance and the saving faith—and with Reformed orthodoxy—in which the irresistible power of the Spirit enlightens and transforms the believer.⁵⁵ Castellio describes this new “art of comprehension” in his last treatise, *De Arte Dubitandi*.

*Conforming Human Comprehension to Expressive Degrees of
Holy Truth in De Arte Dubitandi*

De Arte Dubitandi et confidendi, ignorandi et sciendi was interrupted by the death of its author in 1563, and preserved as a manuscript which was discovered in the second half of the twentieth century.⁵⁶ The first book of this *summa* of Castellio’s thought introduces his doctrine of tolerance by describing, on the one hand, the obscurity of Scripture and the expressive phases in the revelation of God’s truth and, on the other, a suitable process of human comprehension. In the second book, Castellio goes on to apply his theoretical principles to the most controversial and divisive of Christian doctrines: the Trinity, justification, and the Holy Supper.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See Delio Cantimori, *Eretici italiani del Cinquecento*, 157.

⁵⁵ Eugène Honée, “Die Autorität von Schrift und Tradition in den Religionsverhandlungen des augsburger Reichstages vom Jahre 1530,” in *Religious Identity and the Problem of Historical Foundation. The Foundational Character of Authoritative Sources in the History of Christianity and Judaism*, ed. J. Frishman, W. Otten and G. Rouwhorst (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004), 407–437.

⁵⁶ The original manuscript of *De Arte Dubitandi* occupies fols. 56–167 of Miscellany n. 505 preserved in Gemmente Bibliothek, Rotterdam. Modern editions can be found in Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, ed. E. Feist, in *Reale Accademia d’Italia, studi e documenti*, vol. 7, ed. D. Cantimori (Rome: Reale accademia d’Italia, 1937); Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi et confidendi, ignorandi et sciendi*, ed. E. Feist (Leiden: Brill, 1981). Quotations in these pages are from the latter edition.

⁵⁷ On the second book of *De Arte Dubitandi* see Stefania Salvadori, *Sebastiano Castellione e la ragione della tolleranza*, 315–495. An overview of the Castellio’s doctrine of Holy

Reminiscent of the debate with Calvin that began with the trial of Servetus—and even preceded it⁵⁸—Castellio engages in a theological discussion in *De Arte Dubitandi* that reaffirms the obscurity of Scripture, the interpretation of which is useful, but insufficient to secure eternal salvation.⁵⁹ The Bible should be read as a historical and human production of words, of imperfect *verba*,⁶⁰ which transmits a divine and eternal message, the absolutely perfect *res*.⁶¹ The sacred text is in fact a translation of the timeless divine doctrine into human language, making God's truth understandable to all. As such, it inevitably exceeds the adaptation of *verba* to *res*. The letter of the text thus contains a spiritual significance, revealed dimly by analogy within the minds of the faithful, fully by Christ within their hearts, but evident to all in its general meaning, "in perpetuo

Supper as well as references to the relevant works can be found in Stefania Salvadori, "Sebastian Castellio and the Holy Supper: Re-reading Zwingli in the Pursuit of Tolerance," *Zwingliana* 35 (2008): 23–43.

⁵⁸ Castellio's and Calvin's disagreements grew wider during the 1540s because of Castellio's French translation of the Bible as well as his attitude towards specific doctrinal points. The humanist was forced to leave Geneva for Basel in 1545. See Ferdinand Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion*, vol. 1, 15–151 and 180–261.

⁵⁹ An overview of Castellio's hermeneutics can be found in Heinz Liebing, "Die Schriftauslegung Sebastian Castellios," in Heinz Liebing, *Humanismus-Reformation-Konfession. Beiträge zur Kirchengeschichte*, ed. W. Bienert und W. Hage (Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1986), 29–124. The defectiveness of Scripture is well delineated in Sebastian Castellio, *Defensio ad authorem libri, cui titulus est, calumniae nebulonis*. The following quotations are from the seventeenth-century edition: "Scripturam enim non dicit Paulus sufficientem esse, sed utilem. Nam si sufficiens esset, potuisset ex ea Timotheus, in ea à pueris exercitatus, absque viva docentis voce Christum discere. Quod idem dico & de Paulo, antequam Christum cognovisset. & de Iudaeis, qui sacrarum literarum & tunc erant, & hodie sunt scientissimi. Enimvero litera interficit: & Christi spiritu opus est, qui suis mentes aperiat ad literas intelligendas" ("Paul does not assert that Scripture is sufficient, but profitable. If it were in fact sufficient, Timothy, well-versed in it since he was a child, could come to know Christ without the living voice of a teacher. I assert the same of Paul, before he came to know Christ. And I assert the same of the Jews, who were and are still are most knowledgeable in sacred writings. Indeed, the letter kills, and the Spirit of Christ is needed to open the minds of the faithful for the understanding of Scripture"). Sebastian Castellio, *Scripta selecta et rarissima* (Frankfurt am Main, 1696), 144.

⁶⁰ The impossibility of recognizing an imperfection in God's Word and in Scripture according to Calvin is well documented by Peter Opitz, *Calvins theologische Hermeneutik* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1994). Among the traditional analyses of Calvin's hermeneutics the following may be noted: Olivier Millet, *Calvin et la dynamique de la parole: étude de rhétorique réformée* (Paris-Geneva: Honoré Champion-Slatkine, 1992); Gary N. Hansen, *John Calvin and the Non-literal Interpretation of Scripture* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1998); and Barbara Pitkin, *What Pure Eyes Could See: Calvin's Doctrine of Faith in Its Exegetical Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁶¹ Heinz Liebing, *Die Schriftauslegung Sebastian Castellios*, 55–56.

orationis tenore, qui mansit incorruptus" ("in the uninterrupted course of prayer, which endures without corruption").⁶²

Against the Reformed tradition, Castellio argues that the sacred text is composed not only of divine mysteries but also of human errors made by several biblical writers, *auctores sacri*. Nevertheless, scriptural imperfections and mistaken passages in Scripture cannot endanger its authority, which consists in the *tenor sententiae*, or general meaning. It is therefore essential that believers interpret the sacred text and compare each doubtful passage with the overall doctrine of the Bible in order to distinguish divine mysteries, which are *supra sensus*, from human misinterpretations, which are often *contra sensus*—that is, to distinguish truth from error. Should this interpretative provision be rejected, theologians could justify their personal opinions by quoting a single passage of Scripture and accuse their opponents of heresy on the grounds of a personal—and therefore unverifiable—truth, as evidenced in the case of Servetus.⁶³

The insurmountable gap which Renaissance intellectuals perceived between *verba* and *res*⁶⁴ is overcome first of all by means of an appropriate hermeneutics which discloses a sacred message beyond the letter through which it is expressed. This same hermeneutics reveals not only the obscurity of Scripture, but also its internal degrees of authority and clarity, degrees which must be gauged in order to distinguish what God does not want to be known from what believers should understand in spite of all linguistic imperfections. But if a thorough comprehension of Scripture cannot be achieved through an ecclesiastical *magisterium*, nor through an interior spiritual revelation,⁶⁵ an account of its essence must be supplemented by a wider discussion which engages not only the object, Scripture, but also the subject of comprehension, the human intellectual faculties.

⁶² Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 38.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶⁴ Cesare Vasoli, *La dialettica e la retorica dell'Umanesimo: "invenzione" e "metodo" nella cultura del XV–XVI secolo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1968). For the relation between Humanism and the Reformation, see Gary Remer, *Humanism and the Rhetoric of Toleration* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996); Erika Rummel, *The Confessionalization of Humanism in Reformation Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁶⁵ Castellio refuses any ecclesiastical *magisterium* as a consequence of his idea of the true Church which gathers all believers in spirit and cannot be identified in terms of its geographical location or dogmatic creed. Cf. Sebastian Castellio, *De haereticis non puniendis—De l'impunité des hérétiques*, Latin text first edited by B. Becker, French text edited by M. Valkhoff (Geneva: Droz, 1971), 163. On Castellio's confutation of the spiritual revelation proposed by the Reformed tradition, see below.

According to Castellio, theological struggles do not emerge from Christians' inability to solve each scriptural mystery and seize God's truth, but from their ill disposition towards the sacred text. Since believers and particularly theologians are unwilling to confess their ignorance or doubts, they often exhibit a shameless self-confidence and advance their opinions by means of a sophistic *ars dicendi* that enchants only uneducated people.⁶⁶ In their pretensions to omniscience, they engender intolerance and persecutions, having no other recourse than violence to impose their opinions, which are grounded in rhetoric, rather than manifest realities.⁶⁷ They cannot, however, conceal their malice, since their intolerance clearly opposes Christ's example of justice and meekness.

Against those theologians⁶⁸ who accuse him of dangerous scepticism⁶⁹ and argue that human interpretations distort God's unchanging Word, subjecting it to individual readers' whims,⁷⁰ Castellio posits a new strategy of interpretation that distinguishes different aspects of saving truth. In clear reference to Solomon in Ecclesiastes, the Savoyard humanist insists on the recognition of different degrees of evidence and the importance of God's doctrine, to which believers should adapt their gnoseological faculties:

Eadem ego ratione dico: Est dubitandi tempus, est et credendi; est ignorandi tempus, est et sciendi. Sed de sciendo quidem aut credendo non est, quod pluribus disseram, cum in eo nemo, opinor, sit mihi contradicturus. At dubitandum interdum aut ignorandum aliquid, quod dixi, id vero propter contradicentes est demonstrandum, id quod et ratione faciam et auctoritatem. [...] quod autem interdum dubitandum esse doceo, id non sine magna causa facio. Video enim non minus malorum ex non dubitando, ubi dubitare debet, existere quam ex non credendo, ubi credi debet.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 49.

⁶⁷ Cf. Sebastian Castellio, *De haereticis non puniendis*, 17.

⁶⁸ First of all, Theodor Beza, *De haereticis a civili magistratu puniendis libellus adversus Martini Bellii farraginem et novorum Academicorum sectam* (Geneva: per Robert Stephanus, 1554), 161.

⁶⁹ On Castellio as a sceptical thinker, see the Preface of Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: from Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). I agree here with the thesis of Erika Rummel, *The Confessionalization of Humanism in Reformation Germany*, 50–74. On the sceptical tradition during the Renaissance and the early Modern Age, see *The Sceptical Tradition*, ed. M. Burnyeat (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); and *Scepticism and Irreligion in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, ed. R. Popkin and A. Vanderjagt (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

⁷⁰ Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 49.

⁷¹ Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 49. "In the same way, I say, there is a time to doubt and a time to believe; a time to be ignorant and a time to know. There is no need, however, to discuss further knowing and believing, for no one will disagree with me on

Having shown the existence of incomplete and obscure passages in Scripture, Castellio deduces the consequences by shifting the focus of the question from the object, Scripture, to the interpretative powers of human comprehension. Since persecutions and violence stem from an incorrect *ars dicendi*, an inappropriate arrangement of *verba* to express truth, everyone must confess to human weakness, adopting a prudent ignorance—a “*prudens ignorantia*”—so as not to sentence a true Christian to death on the grounds of a personal opinion that diverges from God’s doctrine. For this reason, believers should devote themselves to achieving justice instead of preaching useless rhetoric.⁷² This primacy of ethics over doctrine, characteristic of Castellio’s thought since *De haereticis an sint persequendi*, can be obtained by approaching different passages with the proper gnoseology: ignorance, doubt, science, or faith, depending on whether the object of comprehension is a mystery whose comprehension God does not demand for the purposes of salvation; an ambiguous detail of heavenly truth which can be interpreted in different ways; or a clear and therefore comprehensible *veritas*—a mystery that God has placed beyond believers’ understanding even though he wants them to believe it.⁷³

Castellio first addresses the art of doubting. To his opponents, and to the arbiters of Reformed or Protestant orthodoxy in general, it may have seemed in poor taste to characterize doubt not as a human imperfection, but as a skill which true Christians must acquire and practice. If all were perfectly clear and certain, Castellio reasons, there would be no need for disputation and all human opinions would converge, but this is not the case, as the history of theological debate makes plain.⁷⁴ This is the reason why the *ars dubitandi* is especially useful in matters of religion.

The Savoyard humanist then quotes from the book of Leviticus to remind us that the will of God does not pass judgement on the leper before his leprosy has revealed itself, doubtless because it is impossible to pass judgment on that which remains uncertain.⁷⁵ For Castellio, the same

that point. But I must go into the matter of doubting and not knowing because of those who contradict. I will endeavour to establish the point both by reason and authority . . . Not without great cause do I assert that some things ought to be doubted, for I see no fewer evils arising from not doubting where there should be doubt than from not believing where there should be belief.” *Concerning Heretics*, 289–90.

⁷² Cf. Roland Bainton, “The Parable of the Tares as the Proof Text for Religious Liberty to the End of the Sixteenth Century,” *Church History* 1 (1932), 67–89.

⁷³ Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 51.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 49–50. Scriptural references are to Lv. 13.

conclusion can be drawn with respect to spiritual weakness and error, since “id quod ab eo in una re praeceptum in omnibus eiusdem generis hoc est incertis rebus locum habere debet” (“the rule prescribed by God in this one instance should apply in all similar cases, that is, in all matters which are uncertain”).⁷⁶

De Arte Dubitandi then clarifies what it is that can be ignored, because “non sunt ad salutem necessaria” (“they are not necessary for salvation”).⁷⁷ As we have already seen, the fundamental points of Reformed orthodoxy, such as the Trinity and Predestination, are removed from the *prima principia* on the grounds of the equation between “necessary to salvation” and “comprehensible,” but there is a further point that must be noted. Rather than the traditional *adiaphora* argument,⁷⁸ which Reformed orthodoxy directs against the idolatrous worship of the Roman papacy in order to lead believers back to the simplicity of evangelical doctrine, Castellio appeals in *De Arte Dubitandi* to the same ethical purpose that pertains to doubt. Quoting Christ’s response to those who asked whether he had come to restore the kingdom of Israel,⁷⁹ he rejects the importance of full knowledge on the grounds that “potissimum officio incombere”⁸⁰—that is, because the Apostles’ as well as the believers’ primary concern should be the practice of justice, to which all Christians must pay the utmost care and perseverance, without wasting time and energy in useless discussions.

In sum, the awareness of those cognitive limitations that impede the faithful’s understanding of God’s mysteries, both doubt and ignorance, induces them to devote themselves daily to ethical precepts and, at the same time, to accept the coexistence of different opinions on matters that are unclear, such as the Trinity, predestination and the Holy Supper. At the same time, this principle of ignorance is intended to clarify the distinction between doubting certain passages of Scripture that are either obscure or coincide with *mysteria Dei*, and knowing the *prima principia*

⁷⁶ Ibid., 50.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 50.

⁷⁸ Joseph Verkamp, *The Indifferent Mean: Adiaphorism in the English Reformation to 1554* (Athens: Ohio University Press), 1977.

⁷⁹ Acts 1:7 ff.

⁸⁰ “Haec Christus; quibus verbus ostendit ne Apostolorum quidem, nedum caeterorum esse omnia scire, sed suo potissimum officio incombere. Quapropter sic statuo, esse quaedam, quae ignorari liceat” (“These are the words of Christ by which He showed that neither the apostles nor others need to know everything, but each should attend to his own business. That is why I say that some matters need not be known”). Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 50; *Concerning Heretics*, 290.

that summarize God's essence and the general meaning of the Bible—that is, between human interpretation and an unacceptable denial of divine truth.

The question we are now left with is the following: which gnoseological instrument does Castellio privilege in developing his art of doubt and knowledge, of ignorance and belief? How is each individual believer to distinguish *prima principia* from *mysteria* within the framework of God's *veritas*? For Castellio, the solution is to be found within reason.

Reason as an Instrument of Comprehension

The link proposed in *De haereticis an sint persequendi* between the doctrine of tolerance and the debate on the comprehensibility of God's truth immediately drew fire from Calvin and Beza. In his *De haereticis a civili Magistratu puniendis*, published in 1554, Beza⁸¹ ironically presses his opponent to specify how the truth that is indispensable to salvation might coincide with the comprehensible, or more precisely, what kind of "comprehension" of divine truth Bellius has in mind.⁸² Doesn't the simplicity of the faith he calls for to restore harmony among Christians actually conceal an unholy ignorance of the very basis of their religion? By doubting or ignoring a substantial part of Scripture, how could a believer accede to God's truth and thus to eternal salvation? Was Castellio's solution anything more than a sceptical and blasphemous reduction of the holy faith to a practical philosophy, a *correctio vitae*?⁸³

The answer Castellio gives in his works during the years that elapsed between *De Haereticis non puniendis* and *De Arte Dubitandi* distinguishes between two levels of ignorance: a positive one, which prevents us from passing judgment on anything that human reason cannot attain and which even God does not want to be grasped, i.e. the majority of dogmas as well as all oracles and mysteries; and a negative one, which reveals on the contrary our effort to ignore the limits of human understanding.⁸⁴ As we have already seen, intolerance arises precisely from the latter sort of *ignorantia*, which is concealed by its opposite—that is, the *temeritas affirmandi* of

⁸¹ On Beza, see Alain Dufour, *Théodore de Bèze: poète et théologien* (Geneva: Droz, 2006).

⁸² Theodor Beza, *De haereticis a civili magistratu puniendis*, 68–69.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 56–54.

⁸⁴ Sebastian Castellio, *De haereticis non puniendis*, 46.

some Church doctors who seek to know and to judge all by appealing to a special revelation.⁸⁵ Castellio's concept of reason is set squarely against this *acuto ingenio*, a sort of heavenly comprehension revealed *in interiore homini*, inside the human spirit, which restores corrupted human nature and bridges the gap between the creature's understanding and the truth of his creator.⁸⁶

According to Castellio, the problem is that Reformed orthodoxy presumes to distinguish believers from heretics, and human opinion from the denial of the *prima principia*, in light of a faith which is also a sort of knowledge.⁸⁷ Calvin and many theologians, in fact, claim for themselves a revelation of divine truth which the Father gives them free, *sola gratia*. This revelation assures Christians a thorough comprehension of God's essence while kindling the saving faith within their hearts.⁸⁸ But Castellio argues that this sort of comprehension, concealed in the spirit, cannot be directly testified *in exteriori homini*. It can be judged only by the fruit it bears within the world, fruits of violence and impiety,⁸⁹ the malice of which Christ clearly disdains. Castellio defers instead to the example of Socrates and to his divine *prudens ignorantia*, his "knowing not to know," which enabled him to perfect the art of doubt and belief, of ignorance and knowledge.⁹⁰

This method, the only means whereby the faithful can arrive at an understanding of Scripture and, more generally, of the truth that lies within the grasp of their human faculties, can and should be taught to all those who follow with a pure heart and firm faith in Christ's doctrine of love and justice. It can and should be learned by all because the Father has provided them with the necessary means to achieve this end:

⁸⁵ Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 88–89.

⁸⁶ For an overview of the idea of Creation and of natural theology, see Dieter Groh, *Schöpfung im Widerspruch. Deutungen der Natur und des Menschen von Genesis bis zur Reformation* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003).

⁸⁷ Theodor Beza, *De haereticis a civili magistratu puniendis*, 56.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸⁹ Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 115.

⁹⁰ "Huius sententiae princeps extitit Socrates ille, cuius celebratur dictum illud: 'Scio me nihil scire.' Qui cum Christi luce carens (ut tute facile fateberis) in tenebris versaretur, nihil potuit in illa ignorantia dicere sapientibus" ("Socrates was the author of this statement, whose renowned maxim was: 'I know that I know nothing.' Someone who has not the light of Christ (as you yourself would easily recognize) and remains in darkness could say nothing wiser in such ignorance [of God]"). Sebastian Castellio, *De haereticis non puniendis*, 22.

Nam ratio est ipsa, ut ita loquar, dei filia, quae et ante literas et cerimonias omnes atque adeo ante orbem conditum fuit et post literas et cerimonias omnes atque adeo post mutatum novatumque hunc mundi statum semper futura est neque magis quam ipsemet deus aboleri potest. Ratio, inquam, est aeternus quidam sermo dei longe tum literis tum ceremonis et antiquior et certior, secundum quam deus suos et ante cerimonias et literas docuit et post easdem ita docebit, ut sint vere divinitus docti.⁹¹

Reason is the child of God. It existed before the Scriptures and before the creation of the world, and its existence will have no end. God cannot retract it because it is his everlasting speech, the "aeternus sermo dei," which is manifest in Christ, who never acted, spoke, or judged against it, which is why he is also called the *logos*,⁹² meaning speech. God's Son, like reason, is in fact an everlasting truth speaking inside the believer's soul.⁹³ Quoting Paul,⁹⁴ Castellio finally turns for undeniable proof of his doctrine to human conscience, which he describes as a sort of native intelligence originating precisely from reason, which enables it to pass judgement on right and wrong.⁹⁵

Of course *ratio* here is not human reason, disconnected from God's action as it has been described since Descartes's *Discours de la méthode*, but the undeniable corollary of the Spirit. From this point of view, Castellio is not a forerunner of Modernity. His theory conflates rationalism and spiritualism in order to describe reason as the natural manifestation of divine truth in the interior life of men, the Word of God the Creator

⁹¹ Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 66. "For reason is, so to speak, the daughter of God. She was before letters and ceremonies, and after the world was made; and she is after letters and ceremonies, and after the world is changed and renewed she will endure and can no more be abolished than God Himself. Reason, I say, is a sort of eternal word of God, much older and surer than letters and ceremonies, according to which God taught His people before there were letters and ceremonies, and after these have passed away He will still so teach that men may be truly taught of God." *Concerning Heretics*, 297.

⁹² Castellio seems to refer here to Erasmus's translation of John's Gospel. Cf. Desiderius Erasmus, *Novum Testamentum, cum Adnotationes*, and particularly the translation of Jn. 1:1 in *Evangelium secundum Johannem*, 1,1, in *Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami opera omnia* (Leiden: 1703–06; reprint, Hildesheim, 1961–1962), vol. 6, 335–338. On the erasmian translation from the Greek term *logos* into the Latin *sermo*, see Erika Rummel, *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament: from Philologist to Theologian* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

⁹³ "ratio aut sermo, quod idem est (nam ratio est quasi quaedam interior et aeterna semperque loquens veritatis oratio atque sermo)" ("reason or word [...] are the same [for reason is a sort of interior and eternal word of truth always speaking]"). Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 66; *Concerning Heretics*, 297.

⁹⁴ Rm. 2:14–16.

⁹⁵ Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 66–67.

that ensures freedom of conscience beyond all human doctrines and traditions.⁹⁶

Even so, Castellio's understanding of reason in *De Arte Dubitandi* stands in stark contrast to that of Reformed orthodoxy. His target are those theologians who argue that because of human rebellion against the Father, spiritual blindness precludes all efforts to grasp the saving truth. According to Calvin, human reason, however corrupted, can, in fact, attain knowledge of the Creator by natural means, but it is always tainted by vanity and obstinacy.⁹⁷ It is thus useless to interpret the deepest message of Scripture, which is the heavenly Word, because the saving truth—i.e. the perfect knowledge of God and, consequently, of ourselves—is ultimately found not as a *quidditas*, an object of comprehension which human intelligence can grasp, but rather as God's communicative action.⁹⁸ In Reformed theology, Scripture is thus both an object and a subject, a historical document as well as God's Word, disclosing itself *sola fide* and thus regenerating the true Christian through its own interpretation: *scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpres*.⁹⁹ Believers cannot seize God's *veritas* through natural reason,¹⁰⁰ but must encounter the Father in their hearts;¹⁰¹ allow heavenly grace to enlighten and restore their corrupted nature; and commune with God through that *cognitio dei* that is disclosed through the faith,¹⁰² rather than the *intelligentia* of natural reason.¹⁰³

⁹⁶ See Delio Cantimori, *Eretici italiani del Cinquecento*, 124 ff.; idem, "Note su alcuni aspetti del misticismo del Castellione e della sua fortuna," in *Autour de Michel Servet et Sébastien Castellion*, 239–243.

⁹⁷ See, for instance, John Calvin, *Institutio christianae religionis*, 3.2.7 and 33 (CO 2.403 and 425–426). An overview on the role natural reason played in Reformed orthodoxy can be found in Karl-Heinz Zur Mühlen, *Reformatorsche Vernunftkritik und neuzeitliches Denken* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1980); Robert Miner, *Truth in the Making: Creative Knowledge in Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2004). In reference to Martin Luther, see Bernhard Lohse, *Ratio und Fides: Eine Untersuchung über die Ratio in der Theologie Luthers* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1958).

⁹⁸ On this point, I agree with Peter Opitz, *Calvins theologische Hermeneutik*, 193.

⁹⁹ Cf. Walter Mostert, "Scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpres. Bemerkungen zu Luthers Verständnis der Heiligen Schrift," in *Glaube und Hermeneutik. Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. P. Bühler and G. Ebeling (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 9–41; and Peter Opitz, *Calvins theologische Hermeneutik*, 191–200.

¹⁰⁰ An indispensable introduction to the debate within the Reformation in Günter Frank, *Die Vernunft des Gottesgedankens. Religionphilosophische Studien zur frühen Neuzeit* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2003).

¹⁰¹ Cf. Gerhard Ebeling, "Diputatio de Homine—2. Teil," in Gerhard Ebeling, *Lutherstudien* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1971–1989), vol. 2, 263–277.

¹⁰² Cf. John Calvin, *Institutio christianae religionis*, 2.2.19 (CO 2. 201).

¹⁰³ This set of ideas is the polemical target of *De Arte Dubitandi* with reference to the debate between Castellio and Beza after Servetus's execution. As Beza writes, "Distingui

Castellio, on the other hand, as we have seen, understands *ratio* as a fundamental principle of human comprehension. Since it is God's truth, speaking in human conscience, reason can determine the correctness of scriptural passages as well as that of human interpretations of sacred texts despite the debilitating consequences of the Fall. It can recognize the different degrees of authority and clarity in Scripture by virtue of their resemblance to its essence, which is once again the Father's everlasting *veritas*. Thus, reason is the privileged instrument for adapting human gnoseology to the different ways in which the holy *res* is expressed within it.

However, problems immediately arise once this principle is established. Some theologians may ask why God the Father did not disclose to his children the fullness of his *veritas*. He granted them the *ratio dei filia*, and even so Scripture is so steeped in obscurities that Castellio himself regularly refers to ignorance and doubt as indispensable gnoseological faculties. Seen in this light, Castellio's praise of reason may amount to a mere self-consciousness of human inability to grasp the saving truth, in which case Bellius's equation of "necessary to salvation" and "comprehensible" would confirm Calvin's argument: human reason cannot exceed knowledge of God through nature if God's mysteries are disclosed through faith. Castellio therefore takes care to return once again to his art of doubt and ignorance through a broadening of his doctrine of tolerance.

Referring to reason as the everlasting connection between creature and Creator, Castellio argues in *De Arte Dubitandi* that just as God did not leave food within the nests of birds, having given them wings to seek their nourishment elsewhere, and "noluit igitur alas, opus suae sapientiae, esse otiosas" ("He did not wish them to be lazy in exercising the resources of their intelligence")¹⁰⁴ similarly, he did not leave the significance of

enim debent intelligentia & fides, ita tamen ut qui hanc statuatur, illam quoque necessario ponat, non contra: quia fides ex auditu est predicati verbi: & auditu quidem eiusmodi ut πληροφορεῖαν gignat, & doctrinam universaliter oblatam, singulis electis applicet. Intelligentia vero quamvis & ipsa non sit a natura (Homo enim animalis non intelligit quae Dei sunt,) tamen inter ea dona recensetur quae interdum etiam impiis & reprobis certas ob causas Dominus impertit" ("Understanding and Faith must be distinguished, albeit in such a way that he who upholds the former also deem the latter necessary, rather than contrary, since Faith arises from listening to the Word that is proclaimed. And listening of this kind, in order that it may bear πληροφορεῖαν, and the doctrine that is universally offered, applies to the individual elect. Understanding, although it is not in and of itself a natural faculty (man as an animal understands nothing that pertains to God) could be numbered among the gifts God gives for whatever reasons even to the impious and reprobate"). Theodor Beza, *De haereticis a civili magistratu puniendis*, 74.

¹⁰⁴ Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 58–59; *Concerning Heretics*, 294.

Scripture within his children's grasp, having given them reason through which to seek it, so that for each believer "divina illa hominis industria exerceret" ("exercise that divine industry allotted to man").¹⁰⁵ If all had been clear from the beginning, then reason, the child of God, would remain idle. Since God does nothing in vain, he imbued Scripture with a diversity of degrees of authority and clarity through which reason could train all its gnoseological faculties.

Obscurities and mysteries within the sacred text are thus transformed into an expression of God's wisdom. By putting reason to the test, they legitimize doubt and ignorance on the gnoseological level as essential conditions of comprehension. Since these obscurities and mysteries cannot be grasped directly, they require a mutual tolerance on the part of all the faithful, since each believer must attain full comprehension of God's Word, i.e. eternal salvation, through a daily intellectual and ethical engagement, and engagement which is always open to error and misinterpretation.¹⁰⁶

Thus, Castellio makes clear that his praise of reason is not simply settled *against* faith, but is rather opposed to the equation of faith and knowledge advanced by Calvin. The "ratio dei filia" comes *before* faith, just as it comes *before* any science, doubt, or ignorance. It guides the choices of every individual regarding what should be believed and ignored, or what should be experienced and understood. For Castellio, doubt and ignorance do not reflect a deficiency in human nature, since they serve as the prerequisites of human intellectual and ethical growth. If believers exercise reason throughout their lives and act in accordance with their faith in Christ, they can follow the "via, qua ad Christum veniri possit," the way that leads to Christ, gaining experience and knowledge of God's truth. The question we are left with is precisely how Castellio integrates faith and science into his doctrine of tolerance.

Conclusions: Tolerance between Faith and Science

In contrast to the perfect *cognitio Dei* which exhausts the field of comprehension as it is disclosed through faith,¹⁰⁷ in *De Arte Dubitandi*, reason

¹⁰⁵ Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 59.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁰⁷ On the equation of justification and saving *cognitio dei* in Reformed and Protestant orthodoxy, see Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of*

impels the understanding of God's truth, which is, at the same time, an ethical experience which proceeds from the daily engagement of the faithful. Castellio describes the latter as a soteriological process running from *fides* to *scientia*, which is why he distinguishes so clearly between these two gnoseological faculties.

According to the Savoyard humanist, it seems quite obvious, even to the uneducated, that these terms designate distinct fields of human understanding. The distinction, however, cannot be taken for granted, since many theologians appear to recoil from the bright light of reality,¹⁰⁸ teaching that faith is a sort of "notitiam sive scientiam" ("acquaintance or knowledge"),¹⁰⁹ unaware that even common parlance proves them wrong.

Castellio thus draws a preliminary distinction between the objects of faith and science. Unlike faith, science can only apply to truth, since knowledge of something in *De Arte Dubitandi* refers to a direct grasp of the *res*, i.e. conformity to the ontological evidence of reality thanks to a revised scholastic *adequatio intellectus et rei*. Science, therefore, never deals with error, which cannot be conceived ontologically, since if it were real, it would be true. Error is rather an unfounded opinion of reality, an incorrect assessment of the *res* originating from an *affirmandi temeritas*. The foolhardiness of perception causes reason to miss its target, for it considers a *res* which cannot be known and thus expresses a non-existent object. Faith, on the other hand, as we have seen, is not the equivalent of a supernatural *cognitio* granted in fulfilment of an ascribed justification, but a product of the human will,¹¹⁰ a confidence in Christ, who alone is able to make sinners willing to accept his doctrine and to obey the Father.¹¹¹

Justification (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Even *De Arte Dubitandi* develops and interprets in its own way this same equation, whose main gnoseological consequences these pages deal with. For Castellio's doctrine of justification with reference to the gradual comprehension of God's truth, see Stefania Salvadori, *Sebastiano Castellione e la ragione della tolleranza*, 359–453.

¹⁰⁸ Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 52.

¹⁰⁹ Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 52; *Concerning Heretics*, 291.

¹¹⁰ We do not have the space here to fully engage with Castellio's anthropological model, which is in any event clearly in contrast with Reformed orthodoxy. See Martin Luther, *Galaterkommentar* 40.1; *Galatervorlesung* 40.1; and *De servo arbitrio* 18, in *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1883–1966), 244–294; 603 ff.; and 762 ff., respectively, on the corruption of both the natural reason and human will, the first being *caeca*, the latter *iniusta*. Cf. John Calvin, *Institutio christianae religionis* 3.2.33 (*CO* 2.425–426).

¹¹¹ Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 92.

Having considered the contents of both concepts, Castellio reaffirms his estimation of science in both *De haereticis* and the first part of *De Arte Dubitandi*: “diximus superius ea sciri debere, quae vel ad dei cognitionem vel ad hominum officium sunt necessaria” (“We said above that we must know that which is necessary for the knowledge of God and duty”).¹¹² Science arises from both the undeniable evidence of reality, which pertains to God and nature, as well as ethical principles, and the human experience of justice, which pertains to the daily imitation of Christ’s example. It is therefore both an intellectual achievement and an ethical practice.

It is important to note at the same time that “cognitionem Dei” does not refer in *De Arte Dubitandi* to a complete comprehension of God’s will and action, which may legitimize the *omnia scire* of many theologians.¹¹³ Recalling once again his opponents’ understanding of “comprehensible” as “indispensable for salvation,” Castellio argues that believers should instead recognize the Father as an architect who can be identified through his work, “sicut opifex ex opificio.”¹¹⁴ The same could be said for knowledge concerning “hominum officium,” human duties towards God and neighbour. As in every political state, so in the Christian republic, not all functions are to be performed by everyone, since certain citizens are suited to certain offices.¹¹⁵ It is incumbent upon each believer to know his own task, but not that of others, for blessed is the one who fulfils his own duty, carrying out God’s precepts and thus gaining eternal salvation, even though he remains in ignorance and doubt regarding many passages of Scripture.¹¹⁶

If science applies to reality, faith deals with truth as well as error, since it originates in the reception of words, *verba*, which do not always correspond to reality.

Est igitur credere dictis seu veris seu falsis fidem habere. Saepe enim non minus creditur falsis quam veris, id quod de sciendo dici non potest, quippe falsa quae sunt, sciri non possunt, at credi possunt. Denique fides Christiana virtus est, id quod nemo inficiabitur. At scientia quomodo virtus est, non video nec eam in sacris literis ut virtutem laudari comperio, nisi forte scientiae verbum alicubi pro affectu ponatur, de qua hic non agimus.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 54; *Concerning Heretics*, 292.

¹¹³ See n. 81.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 54–55.

¹¹⁷ Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 52. “To believe then is to give credence to what is told whether true or false. Sometimes the false is believed no less than true. But the

Thus, faith entails a risk which can lead to virtue and happiness as well as to error and damnation. This does not mean that *fides* should be considered blind, for Christians know the existence, love, and justice of God.¹¹⁸ According to Castellio, as long as believers consider whom they trust, i.e. the Father, their faith will not lead to sin, even if what is believed cannot be perfectly determined.¹¹⁹ As the example of Abraham demonstrates, Christians can neither perfectly grasp God's will nor understand the meaning of his promises and commandments. They must trust him, and be confident of his love for them.¹²⁰

In support of this position, the author quotes the example of the Apostle Thomas, whom Christ rebuked for believing in the resurrection only after having seen and touched his wounds.¹²¹ Compared to Abraham, who proved his faith through his willingness to sacrifice his only son in fulfilment of God's commandment, Thomas's knowledge appears to be futile, since it did not arise from faith in God's Word, but from the experience of an objective reality.¹²²

Science and faith are thus interconnected in the process of redemption insofar as both these gnoseological faculties generate an ethically correct practice, one which is always open to doubt and ignorance as well as to error and fault—since it is directed, but not exhausted, by faith¹²³—and which realizes the Christians' *ordo salutis*. In summary, while faith is conducive to behaviour that reflects the contents of one's belief, the Gospel of Christ, it does not ensure the final salvation which remains bound, at

same cannot be said of knowing. The false cannot be known, though it may be believed. That is why Christian faith is a virtue, as no one will deny. But I cannot see how knowledge is a virtue. I do not find it praised as such in Scripture unless in a metaphorical sense which is not under discussion." *Concerning Heretics*, 292.

¹¹⁸ That is, the *prima principia*. See n. 51.

¹¹⁹ "Non enim dico hominem ignorare eum, cui credat, sed ignorare eam rem, quam credat. Novit deum ideoque ei credit, sciens deum esse qui dicat. Sed rem, quam dicit deus, saepe ignorat. [...] Quare in tota hac quaestione etiam animadvertenda est haec distinctio, quam supra posui, aliud esse conoscere eum, cui credas, aliud eam rem quam credas" ("I do not say that people are ignorant of the one in whom they believe, but that they are ignorant of those matters in which they believe. They know God and thus believe in him, knowing that God is the one he says he is. But they ignore those matters of which he speaks. [...] Wherefore throughout this discussion we must take note of the distinction I posited above: knowing the one in whom we believe is one thing, knowing those matters in which we believe is another"). Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 92.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 76–77.

¹²¹ Quotations are from Jn. 20, 24–29.

¹²² Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 52.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 126.

least in part, to the individual's good will.¹²⁴ On the contrary, insofar as knowledge is a mere consequence of experiential truth, it has no intrinsic merit; at the same time, it is the sole purpose of a truly Christian life, since knowledge of God and of his doctrine is the equivalent of eternal salvation.¹²⁵ Faith therefore inaugurates the *ordo salutis*, the accomplishment of which is perfect knowledge. For this reason, *scientia* begins where *fides* ends, so that those who first said "I believe," now say, "I know."¹²⁶ It is in the background of this human *ordo salutis* that all gnoseological faculties are managed by reason and tolerance is finally established.

Urged by faith in the Father, true believers must act in accordance with the heavenly doctrine and so gain that *plena cognitio* which corresponds to eternal life. But they can only do so insofar as they adapt their human comprehension to the expressive degrees of *veritas*. As we have already seen, natural reason leads to the solution: trusting in God's love and justice, Christians must confess their ignorance of many details of saving truth in order to commit themselves to a free moral praxis, thereby enacting what they believe. At the same time, aware that full knowledge can be attained only in the hereafter, they must be satisfied with the *prima principia*, allowing room for doubt for everything that cannot be perfectly grasped.¹²⁷ This awareness of one's own cognitive limitations prevents the

¹²⁴ "Sed non scire beatum est, quippe quod non sit fides neque ex auditu fides, sed ex aspectu existat et in homines etiam sceleratissimos et ab omni virtute alienissimos cadat. Quis enim non credat, quod videt! Sed credere, cum non videas aut scias possisque non credere [...] hoc vero non omnium est et beandum est" ("Knowledge does not correspond to blessedness, because there is no faith that does not come from listening, whereas knowledge arises from seeing, and befalls even the most ungodly and vicious men. Who does not believe what he sees? But to believe without seeing or knowing, thus having cause not to believe [...], this is something that not all can achieve, and is therefore to be blessed"). *Ibid.*, 52–53.

¹²⁵ According to Castellio, as believers understand the *res*, they experience it, thus gaining a full knowledge of reality. Eternal salvation is in fact both a gift—which the Father gives to His children in forgiving their past sins—and a salary—which believers obtain thanks to their daily intellectual and ethical engagement conforming themselves to Christ's example.

¹²⁶ "Et, ut paucis absolvam, ubi scientia incipit, ibi fides desinit, ut, qui ante dixit 'Credo,' idem iam dicat 'Scio'" ("To be brief, where knowledge begins faith ends. He who once said, 'I believe,' now says, 'I know'"). Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 52; *Concerning Heretics*, 292.

¹²⁷ Both the field of opinions on doubtful *res* and that on *adiaphora* are fixed beyond the limits of what is totally understandable and necessary, respectively. In other words, human gnoseological faculties are defined with reference to their degree of evidence—the maximum for *scientia*, the minimum for doubt—and to their degree of utility—the maximum for the faith, the minimum for *adiaphora*. See Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*, 52–56.

believer from censuring those of others. Ignorance and doubt—as well as the errors which they generate—must necessarily be tolerated in a community whose members are naturally disenfranchised from perfect knowledge. Indeed, reason instructs believers to acknowledge their limitations and to correct one another according to the rule of charity established by Christ's teaching. This is the "reason of tolerance" that Castellio's *ars dubitandi* opposes to theological arrogance. What many may condemn as heresy is nothing but the simplicity of God's truth, the key to harmony among true Christians.

HARMONY AND LETTER, SYNCRETISM AND LITERALISM

Toby Levers

Introduction

The focus of this paper is Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), his philosophy of synthesis and concord, and his contribution to European intellectual history, but at the foundation of my argument will be an inquiry into the consequences of the medieval problem of the “literal sense.” By “problem,” I mean very generally the fact that the *sensus litteralis* was a persistent concern for medieval intellectuals. My aim is to show how the preoccupation with the literal—the debates over the meaning and use of the word, and its growing importance in late medieval theories of interpretation—itself provides the background for Pico’s exaggerated philosophical system of correspondence and esoteric unity.

In much of what follows I will be bringing together the fruitful work of scholars from the fields of literary criticism and intellectual history in order to suggest a general point about literalism and Pico. In a 1996 article, Alistair Minnis characterizes Girolamo Savonarola’s (1452–1498) *Opus perutile* as exemplary of fifteenth-century “Thomistic literalism.”¹ Literalism in this sense is an exegetical trend stemming from the late medieval commentary tradition—a tendency to focus on the literal sense of words in Scripture and literary texts. In this paper I will look at Pico’s theory of allegory specifically in relation to this trend, asking how “literalism” figures in the philosophy of Savonarola’s brilliant contemporary. After an overview of the permutations of the term “literal” in medieval exegesis, I will describe how Pico’s theory of allegory (with its implicit position on the literal) is central to his philosophy. Finally, I will argue as to how allegory and literalism are connected more broadly to Pico’s syncretism. We will ultimately find that the conceptual trends associated with literalism—namely, interest in the intentions of historical authors

¹ Alistair J. Minnis, “Fifteenth-Century Versions of Thomistic Literalism: Girolamo Savonarola and Alfonso de Madrigal,” in *Neue Richtungen in der hoch- und spätmittelalterlichen Bibelexegese*, ed. Robert E. Lerner and Elizabeth Müller-Luckner (Munich: R. Oldebourg Verlag, 1996), 163–179.

and a tendency to compare pagan and scriptural texts—play important roles in Pico's reconciliative philosophy.

In suggesting this connection, I would like to also consider Pico in terms of his contribution to European intellectual culture—not in his usual role as theorist of human freedom and multipotentiality,² but in terms of his place in what Charles Taylor calls the “epistemological tradition.”³ Pico's syncretism is exemplary of a larger shift towards human thought as the primary object of philosophical inquiry, a shift that is at the heart of modernity (in connection to figures like Descartes and Kant).⁴ In this essay, by characterizing the medieval attitudes to the literal as a “background” of Pico's work, I hope to show how the problem of the literal sense—the mere fact that its status was a pressing and recurrent topic—provides a crucial conceptual vocabulary for the modern turn toward epistemology.

In a sense, this thesis might seem somewhat obvious, for if we talk about the theme of the literal very broadly, we can see straightforward links to concepts like Averroes's double truth or Luther's *sola scriptura*, and from there speculate broadly on the issues of thought and signification in Western intellectual culture. This would be a legitimate subject of reflection in my opinion, but a vague one, and so I hope rather to ground the present analysis in the specific context in which the literal sense became a “problem”: medieval biblical and literary exegesis. This is fairly well-trodden ground—Beryl Smalley and Alistair Minnis, in their studies of the medieval commentary tradition, have done much to elucidate the medieval attitudes to the literal sense and the concept's important role in the growing focus on human thought and intention. But their contributions are concerned specifically with the field of textual interpretation and its development into what we now know as literary theory. Even in

² See Charles Trinkaus, “Cosmos and Man: Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico on the Structure of the Universe and the Freedom of Man,” *Vivens Homo* 5 (1994): 343.

³ See Charles Taylor, “Overcoming Epistemology,” in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). Taylor describes the “epistemological enterprise” running through Descartes, Locke, and Kant, as the notion that “the very center of philosophy was its theory of knowledge” and that “philosophical reflection concerned the validity of claims to knowledge.” He goes on to characterize continental philosophy and Anglo-Saxon contributions like Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* as the running challenges to this enterprise. See also Taylor's discussion of Pico in *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 199–200.

⁴ I.e., the *cogito* of Descartes's second *Meditation*, and the theoretical standpoint of Kant's Critical Philosophy—both setting the ground for a rigorous location of philosophical certainty in the investigation of thought, which continues through Husserlian phenomenology and the philosophy of language and mind of Austin and Searle.

making this connection, Minnis is cautious: "In that final stage [the thirteenth-century commentary tradition]... may be detected the origins of modern literary criticism as we know it."⁵

With this in mind, it might be said that it is an even larger claim to connect medieval literalism to Descartes and Kant. However, whereas Minnis is asserting a continuity between specific cultural institutions (biblical exegesis and modern literary criticism), I am suggesting a more diffuse consequence of one particular facet of the medieval commentary tradition. The problem of the *sensus litteralis*—the debates over its importance, but also simply its popularization as a flexible intellectual catchphrase in the Middle Ages and then the Renaissance—provides an intellectual context for the modern thematization of human thought. To this end, rather than Descartes and Kant, one might talk about the consequences of the *sensus litteralis* in a different and earlier period of philosophical and scientific upheaval—for example, one could look at the accusations leveled against Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) in the early 1600s. In the wake of the council of Trent, where the Church's defensive gesture against Copernicanism came in the form of a strict defense of the priority of the literal sense of Scripture,⁶ Galileo's antagonists attacked him most vehemently by characterizing his findings as threats to the authority of the literal sense of the Bible (i.e., the Catholic Church's assertion of the historical truth of the events described literally in the Bible, such as Joshua's implicitly geocentric command that the sun stand still [Jos 10:12]).

Galileo's defense was not to challenge the truth of the literal sense, but to allow for ambiguity in human language on account of the fallibility of human interpretation. God's language (both the things and events he creates in nature, and the Scripture he inspires, which recounts those things and events literally) is infallible and uncaring as to whether or not humans understand it, which they often do not.⁷ For obvious reasons, this episode is an important one in the history of modern thought, and it is the vocabulary of biblical interpretation and the issue of the literal sense

⁵ See A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c. 1100–c. 1375: the Commentary Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 2.

⁶ See Richard Blackwell, *Galileo, Bellarmine, and the Bible: Including a Translation of Foscarini's Letter on the Motion of the Earth* (Notre Dame; London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 5–27. Indeed, Galileo's first subjection to censorship was regarding the truth of the Scripture on the mutability of the heavens, whereas in the same text the censor passed over his declaration of commitment to Copernicanism.

⁷ Blackwell, *Galileo, Bellarmine, and the Bible*, 64–69.

of words (which had been a pressing cultural topic for several centuries by Galileo's time) that provide the ground for the public attack against Galileo, as well as for his own defense in terms of a theory of human knowledge (our limited capacity to understand in relation to the overwhelming truth of God's nature).

But Galileo's foray into Biblical exegesis was a deliberately limited one, and at any rate, as I have said, I want to look not only at explicit examples of the "problem of the literal," but also at the issue itself as a background attitude—how it became taken for granted, by Galileo's time, that the language used to debate the new astronomical revolution was an exegetical language, focused on the all-important interpretive term "literal." For this purpose, even closer to the context of the issue of the literal sense is Pico, steeped as he was in the vocabulary of medieval exegesis, as well as the thought of Aristotelianism and the scholastics, Florentine Neoplatonism, and Hebrew biblical interpretation—strains of thought that each had a particular stance on the *sensus litteralis*. Indeed, Pico was such a legitimate eclectic⁸ that we can meander in many directions while investigating the sources of his thought. But if, as I suggest, we consider how the importance of the literal sense had become established to the point of transparency by Pico's time, we will see the usefulness of the term as a perspective through which to examine Pico's work and its place in Western thought.

I will first outline what the expansion of the literal was—what was behind the literalist vogue in the commentary tradition, and what its immediate consequences were. I will then lay out the connections I want to make between this vogue and Pico's thought, looking at concrete examples of the role of exegetical theory in his works, and connecting the medieval expansion of the *sensus literalis* to the correlative method that constitutes his "new philosophy." We will begin with Pico's most direct engagement with the vocabulary of exegesis, first in the theoretical substance of his *Heptaplus* and his *Commento*, and then in the broader scope of his *philosophia nova*. The two main conceptual threads that run through Pico's works—the "principle of mutual containment," and the

⁸ On Pico's learning and his sources, see Stephen A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486): the Evolution of Traditional, Religious, and Philosophical Systems: with Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Tempe, Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1998), 1–18; Crofton Black, *Pico's Heptaplus and Biblical Hermeneutics* (Leiden: Boston: Brill, 2006), 5–25; Eugenio Garin, *Italian Humanism: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*, trans. Peter Munz (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 101–104.

concept of an intellectual ascent to *felicitas*—are connected to key trends that scholars associate with the “expansion” of the *sensus literalis* in the late Middle Ages. In this period, the even-handed comparison of pagan and scriptural authors and the interest in the “human author” are hallmarks of the exegetical tradition, and these same trends become key factors of Pico’s reconciliative philosophy.

The Expansion of the Literal

The “expansion of the literal” that I refer to is the increasing importance of the concept of the *sensus litteralis* in thirteenth-century biblical interpretation, and the running debates over its priority in human understanding of the written word.⁹ The literal sense is the most basic meaning of the letter—the most common signification of a word.¹⁰ The literal thus represents an authoritative ground of common understanding; any mention of a literal sense implies (or imposes) a common sense of what words point to most basically. This is a fairly simplistic working definition—indeed, what makes the *sensus litteralis* important to us are the nuances that complicate this definition over the centuries. Readers can and did disagree on the literal sense: not only on what the literal meaning of words is, but also on the relation of those words to non-literal meaning.

This point is one that I would like to keep in mind: when commentators are writing about the *sensus litteralis* they are giving voice to basic assumptions about meaning. The concept of the literal articulates agreements over “common meaning,” but it can also articulate the concerns

⁹ Minnis sums it up thus: “From the thirteenth century until the end of the Middle Ages, Aristotle was ‘the Philosopher.’ The stimulus provided by his *libri naturales* and other recently recovered works can hardly be exaggerated . . . Aristotelian theory of causality encouraged exegetes to adopt a new type of prologue organized around the four main causes described by ‘the Philosopher,’ an approach which encouraged new attitudes to such matters as authorship and authority, and literary style and structure. Aristotelian epistemology gave the human faculties and human perception a new dignity; late medieval scholars afforded the ‘body’ of Scripture, its literal sense, a corresponding dignity. A new semantics emerged.” Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 197.

¹⁰ Again quoting Minnis, words “are literal when they are used in accordance with their normal signification, as when the word ‘ox’ refers to an animal in a herd because linguistic convention decrees that this be so. Figurative signs, [Hugh of St. Victor] continues, ‘occur when that thing which we designate by a literal sign is used to signify something else; thus we say “ox” and by that syllable understand the animal which is ordinarily designated by that word, but again by that animal we understand an evangelist, as is signified in the Scripture, according to the interpretation of the Apostle, when it says, “Though shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn”’ (Deut. 25:4).” Ibid., 66.

that commentators had on the nature of the events described “literally.” Most prevalently, this concern appears in the form of the opposition of Scripture to pagan poetry. Both describe events in the same literal manner, but in Scripture these events themselves are significative (God’s language of things), whereas in poetry they are fictional integuments which cover deep moral and philosophical truths in layers.¹¹ The concept of the literal thus presents to us the concerns of commentators over the basic units of interpretive certainty, and on the ontology of the things that are signified by words (historical and spiritually significant events, or “fables” of the imagination).

Over the centuries, commentators will negotiate this question of interpretive certainty by looking to the “nature” of the person who wrote the words—the ground of authorial identity. This will first come as a straightforward distinction between poets and religious prophets—the knowledge of the different statuses of David and Ovid allows the reader to make assumptions about the truth and significance of things described literally by each author. But this will become complicated in comparisons between authors like Solomon and Aristotle, both of whom offered philosophical instruction, and the former of whom was morally dubious enough to be open to comparison with pagan figures.¹² This sort of complication compels (or allows) commentators to be more nuanced in their approach to the nature of the author, and they will more frequently connect their interpretations to a concept of authorial identity and intention. Taking into account the moral and literary activity of authors, commentators will build a more personal portrait of them as historical individuals, and from this portrait readers will assume a certain access to the minds of those individuals (*intentio auctoris*).

¹¹ On the trope of the “garments of allegory” (the clothing of words and the “naked truth”) and on the question of the literal sense in interpretations of pagan texts and in the *Roman de la Rose*, see A. J. Minnis, *Lifting the Veil: Sexual/Textual Nakedness in the Roman de la Rose* (London: Exeter: King’s College London Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1995), 1–4.

¹² That is, the very fact that Solomon, like David, was known to have committed earthly transgressions encouraged exegetes to approach him as a unique historical individual—part and parcel of his complex role as poet, prophet, and philosopher. See A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 103–112.

The Literal in Early Medieval Exegesis

I have described these developments as occurring in the late Middle Ages. A good starting point prior to this is Augustine's employment of the *sensus literalis* in his theory of the semiotics of allegory in *De doctrina christiana*. In books two and three of this treatise, Augustine (354–430) describes the two difficulties that present themselves to a reader in the act of interpretation: unknown signs (words in unknown languages) and ambiguous signs (words that do not refer in a straightforward way). The problem of ambiguous signs comes down to the confusion of two types of reading: taking words in the literal sense and taking them in the figurative sense. The literal sense is a "proper word" that points to its most common referent, whereas the figurative sense is a word that points beyond its proper meaning to a larger truth or to a lesson from the Scripture.¹³ Augustine strongly favors savoring the figurative interpretation of words,¹⁴ and thus he warns against a "slavery to the literal," wherein the reader does not look beyond the basic meanings of words and thus is deprived of the true value of Scripture (the lessons of the figurative senses). Quoting Paul ("The letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life" [2 Corinthians 3:6]) Augustine warns that "blind adherence to the letter" can be equivalent to the "death of the soul," and establishes the rule that all ambiguous words (whose proper referents are unclear) must be interpreted figuratively.¹⁵

Augustine is far off from the thirteenth-century "expansion of the literal," which will privilege the literal and its connection to human thought, and influence subsequent thinkers like Pico della Mirandola. Augustine prioritizes allegorical interpretation, establishing the rule that all ambiguities must be resolved in figurative terms, rather than by explaining the literal meaning.¹⁶ Even in this early, anti-literalist example, however, we can see the elements that I hope to bring out in establishing the background attitude of the issue of the literal. In his efforts to promote figurative interpretation, Augustine is compelled to take a stance on the literal sense, and he does so in terms of authorial intention: "Sed quisquis in Scripturis aliud sentit quam ille qui scripsit, illis non mentientibus

¹³ See Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 2.10.15, in *PL* 34, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1841–64). English translations of this work are taken from *Teaching Christianity (De Doctrina Christiana)*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park: Mew City Press, 1996).

¹⁴ See Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 203–205.

¹⁵ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 3.5.9.

¹⁶ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 3.10.14.

fallitur" ("but any who understand a passage in the Scriptures to mean something which the writer did not mean are mistaken")¹⁷—the ambiguities of interpretation and the various possible meanings of words can create a gap between authorial intention and the reader's understanding. Augustine goes on to point out that going "astray" (misunderstanding the author's intention) is in fact acceptable—it is as though the reader (a "good" reader, who reads with love) takes a different road to the same destination.¹⁸ Although Augustine's enjoyment of figurative interpretation is a far cry from Thomas Aquinas, who in the thirteenth century will assert that all interpretation must be rigorously connected to the literal meaning of words,¹⁹ *De doctrina christiana* highlights the key element of the literal for us—that when exegetes discuss literal meaning, they articulate their concerns about understanding and interpretation on the most basic level, and in so doing, they often fall back on statements about the human mind, such as the intention of the author and the reader's understanding.

Up through the twelfth century, commentators generally echo Augustine's tempered approach to the literal. The emphasis is on the divine authorship of the Bible, that is, on God rather than the prophetic human authors, and thus exegetes focus on developing new methods of unlocking allegorical meaning, paying less attention to the strict interpretation of the literal sense. Peter Lombard (1100–1160), a towering figure of this tradition, epitomizes this attitude in his commentary on the Psalter. He identifies the subject matter (*materia*) of the Psalms as its allegorical content—its symbolic meaning and ultimately the "whole" of Christ.²⁰ In so doing, he marginalizes the importance of the literal sense, pays little attention to the role of the historical human author, David, and explains the *intentio* of the work in terms of overarching allegory rather than human thought and expression.²¹ Thus, the term "literal" is ever present, but again as a point of contrast to the proper procedure of interpretation—the exploration of allegory by means of the instruments of exegesis.²²

When the literal sense is more directly discussed in this period, however, we again see, as with Augustine, a connection to the very basic

¹⁷ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 1.36.40–41; *Teaching Christianity*, 124.

¹⁸ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 1.36.41.

¹⁹ See Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 204.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 70–71, 110.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 109–110.

²² For Lombard, this is an analysis of the text in terms of title (*titulus*), subject-matter (*materia*), intention (*intentio*) and mode of treatment (*modus tractandi*). See Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 70, 105–112.

question of the reader's understanding of authorial intention. In the sixth book of his *Didascalicon*, Hugh of St. Victor (1078–1141), member of a school that was heavily influenced by Augustine,²³ asserts that in approaching ambiguous words in the Bible, readers should evaluate the variety of patristic explanations and choose the meaning that is closest to what the author appears to have intended.²⁴ While upholding Augustine's dichotomy of significative words and things, and continuing the Augustinian project of systematically approaching the dangerous ambiguities of biblical passages, Hugh emphasizes the ground of literal interpretation as the key to the intentions of the historical, human authors of Scripture. In contrast to Augustine, however, Hugh warns readers *not* to hide behind Paul's dictum that the "letter killeth," and instead to pay attention to the literal meanings of passages that do not appear to have clear allegorical *sententiae*.²⁵

This and similar examples (such as the more experimental work of Peter Abelard [1079–1142])²⁶ show us that while the main goal of the commentary tradition in this period remained the unlocking of hidden allegorical meaning, the common, human meanings of words (the literal) was a recurrent concern, and always in discussions of the most basic "breakdown" of interpretation in the face of ambiguous signs.²⁷ Even if

²³ See Grover A. Zinn, Jr., "The Influence of Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* upon the Writings of Hugh of St. Victor," in *Reading and Wisdom: The De doctrina christiana of Augustine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Edward D. English (Notre Dame: London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 48–60.

²⁴ See Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 66–67; 71–86.

²⁵ That is, he urges readers to look to the meaning of the letter as the author understood it rather than as they (readers) want to understand it. Minnis describes Hugh as "[r]eacting against the Gregorian allegorizing tradition with its 'sublime disregard for the letter of Scripture' (as Beryl Smalley describes it)." Ibid., 66. Cf. Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 94–95.

²⁶ Abelard's *Sic et non*, while firmly entrenched in the twelfth-century vocabulary of allegorical interpretation, also emphasizes points which foreshadow literalist interpretation: the historical contexts of biblical authors; the personal intentions of these authors; the "affective" usefulness of interpreting texts; the possibility of error in patristic writings; the possibility of error in Scripture. See Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 67–69 and 87–105.

²⁷ With the word "breakdown" I deliberately use a Heideggerian, phenomenological vocabulary. This follows my general approach: Heidegger's most basic hermeneutic technique is to look at the non-representational, non-rational "background" attitudes and practices of individuals and cultures (as I am doing), and to show how "breakdowns" in the flow of these practices reveal the basic vocabularies and primordial anxieties of the individual or culture. Thus, breakdowns reveal what the normally transparent background itself *is*, and demand a re-evaluation of basic concepts. In one passage of *Being and Time*, Heidegger foreshadows Thomas Kuhn by putting this in terms of the sciences:

the *sensus litteralis* is of secondary importance up to the twelfth century, it looms whenever there are doubts about the procedure of interpretation, and provides a vocabulary for the negotiation of these doubts in terms of basic understanding and interpretive certainty.

The Expansion of the Sensus Litteralis

In the thirteenth century, the recent discovery of Aristotle's *libri naturales* and other lost works sparked a veritable revolution in the commentary tradition. Disseminated by Arab commentaries, those of Roger Bacon (1214–1294) and Robert Grosseteste (1175–1253), and the translations of William of Moerbeke (1215–1286), “the Philosopher’s” works came to permeate many if not all areas of intellectual and academic culture. In the commentary tradition, the profound change came in the form of the vocabulary of Aristotelian causality. Superficially, this meant a change in the categories that commentators used in prologues to works—biblical and pagan.

In the twelfth century, a text was analyzed in terms of “the title of the work, the name of the author, the intention of the author, the material or subject-matter of the work, its mode of literary procedure, its order or arrangement, its usefulness, and the branch of learning to which it belonged.”²⁸ With the arrival of Aristotelian terminology, commentators began to analyze works in terms of their causal aspects: the “efficient,” “material,” “formal,” and “final” causes.²⁹ With this emphasis on causality came a new interest in the human authors of Scripture. Rather than affirming the divine authorship of the Bible, and thus prioritizing a Neoplatonic

“The real ‘movement’ of the sciences takes place when their basic concepts undergo a more or less radical revision which is transparent to itself. The level which a science has reached is determined by how far it is *capable* of a crisis in its basic concepts. In such immanent crises the very relationship between positively investigative inquiry and those things themselves that are under interrogation comes to a point where it begins to totter.” Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 29. This quote sums up why I find the question of the literal to be illuminating beyond the science of theology—in thinkers such as Pico, who infuses contemporary attitudes on the literal sense into the core of his philosophy, and more generally in the modern epistemological tradition.

²⁸ Quoting Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 4. See 1–72 for a detailed discussion of the terms that preceded the Aristotelian causal vocabulary.

²⁹ Respectively, the motivating agent or author (*causa efficiens*), the materials used by the author (*causa materialis*), the author’s literary style and structure (*causa formalis*), the end or objective of the work (*causa finalis*). See Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 5.

allegorizing interpretation, commentators began to focus on human authorship: the historical individuals responsible for writing down the words of the Bible.

In terms of the basic practice of interpretation, this interest in the human author is connected to a location of meaning in the letter: rather than being subservient to allegorical interpretation (and only used in cases of ambiguity), the literal sense rapidly becomes the unifying ground of thirteenth-century interpretation, the sense in which all figurative possibilities are *contained*. Moderate earlier appraisals of the literal, such as that of Hugh of St. Victor, will explode into a general preoccupation with the literal as the ground of interpretive certainty. Thus, in his commentary on the *Song of Songs* (which is present in both his *Postilla litteralis* and his *Postilla moralis*) Nicholas of Lyre (1270–1349) states that his primary intention is to present the literal sense, and he emphasizes that with the literal sense the reader is able to peer into scripture even deeper than the level of proper meanings, and see the intentions of both the human and the divine author: “... loquendo tamen de sensu litterali, cui prout potero insistere intendo. Et est hic sensus litteralis, non ille qui per voces significatur, sed qui per res significatas primo intelligitur...” (“... it is the literal sense which I intend to present, to the best of my ability. And the literal sense is this, *not* that which is signified by the words, but that which is signified by the things signified by the words...”).³⁰ The literal here is far more than the common meaning of a word, only to be referred to in cases of ambiguity—it is the reader’s most basic, important indication of authorial intention. In the general prologue to his *Postilla litteralis*, Lyre makes it clear that the literal sense, rather than one option among several, is the “foundation” of all interpretation, connected perforce to all acceptable or “appropriate” mystical interpretations.³¹ In this passage, the literal sense is not merely connected to the common or “proper” meanings of words, only to be referred to in cases of ambiguity. Rather than one option among several, the literal sense is the “foundation” of all interpretation, connected perforce to all acceptable or “appropriate” mystical interpretations. This high valuation of the literal reaches its apex in statements such as the following by St. Bonaventure (1221–1274):

³⁰ *The Postilla of Nicholas of Lyra on the Song of Songs*, ed. and trans. James George Kiecker. “Biblical Studies” series (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998), vol. 3, 30–31.

³¹ Translated in Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 268.

Ad quod non potest qui de facili pertingere, nisi per assuefactione lectionis, textam et literam Bibliae commendet memoriae; alioquin in expositione scripturarum nunquam poterit esse potens. Unde sicut qui dedignatur prima addiscere elementa, ex quibus dictio integratur, nunquam potest nosse nec dictionum significatum, nec rectam legem constructionum. Sic qui literam sacrae scriptura spernit, ad spirituales eius intelligentias nunquam assurgit.³²

Ultimately the patron saint of literalism will be Aquinas, who strongly affirms the link between the letter and authorial intention,³³ plainly states that the literal sense is always true,³⁴ and asserts that all logical arguments must be derived from an understanding of the letter.³⁵

Going along with this literalist vogue is a predictable “jargonization” of the term *sensus litteralis* itself. The result is that the meaning of the word itself flirts with self-contradiction. In the fourteenth century, William of Nottingham (d. ca. 1336) and Nicholas of Lyre describe a *duplex sensus litteralis*—a twofold literal sense, consisting of both the “proper” meaning and the “figurative” meanings themselves.³⁶ This paradoxical re-definition is perhaps to be expected when a great deal of pressure is put on a word meaning “meaning.” But it is only a paradox if we ourselves are strict literalists—that is, if we adhere conservatively to the older meaning of the

³² Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, Prologue, sect. 6, in *Opera omnia* (Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi): Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1882–1902). “No one can easily reach this standard of exposition unless he is thoroughly familiar with the text and commits the text and its literal sense to memory. Otherwise he will never have any real capacity to expound the Scriptures. The man who is too proud to learn the elements which go to make up a word can never understand the meaning of words or correct grammatical construction. Just so, he who scorns the letter of Holy Scripture can never rise to interpreting its spiritual meanings.” Translated in Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 237.

³³ “sensus litteralis est, quem auctor intendit” (“...the literal sense is that which the author intends”). *Summa theologiae* 1a q. 1, art. 10; translated in Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 242.

³⁴ “In quo patet quod sensui litterali sacrae Scripturae nunquam potest subesse falsum” (“It is clear from this that nothing false can underlie the literal sense of Holy Scripture”). *Summa theologiae* 1a q. 1, art. 10, ad 3; translated in Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 243.

³⁵ “Ex quo solo potest trahi argumentum, non autem ex his quae secundum allegoriam dicuntur, ut dicit Augustinus in epistola contra Vincentium Donatistam. Non tamen ex hoc aliquid deperit sacrae Scripturae, quia nihil sub spirituali sensu continetur fidei necessarium, quod Scriptura per litteralem sensum alicubi manifeste non tradat” (“All argument must derive from this [the literal sense] alone, and not from what is said in the allegorical sense... For no part of Holy Scripture loses any of its force because of this, for nothing necessary to faith is contained within the spiritual sense which Scripture does not openly convey elsewhere through the literal sense”). *Summa theologiae*: 1a q. 1, art. 10, ad 1. Translated in Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 242.

³⁶ Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 205–206.

word, which put the *sensus literalis* in direct opposition to the figurative senses. The *duplex sensus literalis* indicates that the usage of the term “literal” was beginning to remove this opposition and embrace the notion that the literal sense “contains” the other senses.

I will now move on to Pico della Mirandola, whose works I will approach in terms of the consequences of the issue of the literal. There are certainly broad cultural implications stemming from the expansion of the literal—earlier I alluded to its presence in Reformation thought,³⁷ and briefly described its role in the confrontation of Church and science stemming from Galileo’s work. With Pico, I want to stay close to the more immediate consequences of the expansion of the literal. Two aspects that I will emphasize are the connection of the *sensus literalis* to authorial intention and historical individuality (the “human author”), and the related issue of scriptural and pagan authority—how the problem of the literal opens up an interpretive space in which both groups are approached and understood in a comparable or even identical manner. These factors are at work explicitly in Pico’s exegetical works, and more generally in the method and the objective of his syncretist philosophy.

Pico’s Philosophia Nova

We label Pico today as a “syncretist” who hoped to reconcile disparate theological and philosophical systems, and we know him largely through his so-called *Oratio de dignitate hominis* and its praise of man’s uniquely admirable ontico-intellectual liberty, that is, his capacity for self creation.³⁸ Given the relative breadth of Pico’s sources, as attested in his own *compilatio*, the *900 conclusiones* or *Theses*, it is tempting to follow Stephen Farmer in endorsing and emphasizing the syncretist label—Farmer insists upon the radical nature of Pico’s reconciliative system, and suggests an anthropological comparison to similar examples of “correlative thought”

³⁷ Martin Luther at one point states, “The literal sense does it. In it there’s life, comfort, power, instruction and skill,” and William Tyndale gives voice to the Reformation’s eschewing of allegorical interpretation by reaffirming the notion that the literal contains the other senses: “The literal sense is the root and ground of all . . . that which the proverb, similitude, riddle, or allegory signifieth, is ever the literal sense.” Both quotes cited in Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 206 and notes.

³⁸ On the popularity of this work, owing mainly to its appeal for post-Kantian historians, see Brian Copenhaver’s *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article on Pico, consulted electronically at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pico-della-mirandola/> and Charles Trinkaus, “Cosmos and Man.”

that appear in other cultures and traditions, an approach which itself demonstrates the reconciliative register of the modern humanist and scientific perspective.³⁹

It is just as well, however, to make the syncretist label more precise by approaching it on Pico's own terms—namely, his own stated goal of reconciling the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle once and for all, which he called his *philosophia nova*.⁴⁰ Indeed, if we were to take Pico's core syncretist belief seriously for a moment—that is, the principle of mutual containment, according to which “omnia sunt in omnibus modo suo” (“all things exist in all things in their own mode”)⁴¹—we would have to concede that *all* thought is by nature the same, every thought being a uniquely variegated unity of all “other” thoughts, and thus we might clarify Pico's project as a collection and harmonization of all articulations of thought known to him, culminating hypothetically in the reconciliation of the two metaphysical antipodes, Plato and Aristotle.

At any rate, my aim here will be to further specify Pico's label of “syncretist” or “harmonizer of Plato and Aristotle” in terms of a particular concept. Our approach is through the question of the literal sense as I have outlined it, which is in many ways a distillation of the medieval fortunes of the two Greek philosophers in the form of one particular concept or technical term. It is looking at this opposition from the ground up, as it were: rather than approaching it through the names of Platonic or Aristotelian thinkers, we have tracked the progression of the literal from its incidental value in Augustine's Platonic semiotics to its role as the bedrock of interpretive and logical certainty in Aquinas's Aristotelian system. Thus we have used the literal to get a sense of how the opposition of Plato and Aristotle (the universal and the particular) was infused into the interpretive vocabulary of the commentary tradition.

Pico and the Letter

Let us look first at specific cases in which Pico deals with a theory of allegory and the idea of the “letter.” In 1489, Pico published his *Heptaplus*, an

³⁹ Stephen A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 59–96.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴¹ Pico repeats this maxim in all his major works. In the *Heptaplus*'s second proem, Pico traces the principle to Anaxagoras, as well as the Pythagoreans and Moses. See Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 29; 86–89.

exegesis of the six days of creation of Genesis. Although the work is Pico's contribution to a tradition of Genesis commentaries,⁴² it is no less distinctive than his earlier and much vaster *900 Theses* (1486). That is, writing an exegetical work was by no means a conservative step back from the radical syncretism of the earlier work—whereas the *Theses* compiled the propositions of disparate traditions without analysis, the *Heptaplus* compiles and synchronizes various methods of analysis. Each of the book's seven expositions introduces a particular interpretive register—a “body of knowledge” or analytical theme—and explores the register through an allegorical interpretation of the corresponding day.⁴³ In the second of his two introductory proems, Pico articulates most fully the theory of allegory that is linked to his core syncretist doctrine:

Hoc tantum addiderimus: mundorum mutuam continentiam sacris etiam literis indicari, cum et scriptum in Psalmis [135.5] sit: Qui creat caelos in intellectu, et angelos Dei legimus spiritus esse et ministros eius flammam ignis urentis; hinc saepe divinis caelestia cognomenta, saepe etiam terrena: dum nunc per stellas, nunc per rotas et animalia, nunc per elementa figurantur: hinc et terrenis saepe caelestia nomina. Quoniam scilicet astricti vinculis concordiae uti naturas ita etiam appellationes hi omnes mundi mutua sibi liberalitate condonant. Ab hoc principio (si quis fortasse hoc nondum advertit) totius sensus allegorici disciplina manavit.⁴⁴

⁴² See Pico's own list of Genesis commentators in the first proem to the *Heptaplus*, in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scritti vari*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Florence: Vallecchi, 1942), 178–180. All translations of Pico's works are taken from Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man, On Being and the One, Heptaplus*, trans. Douglas Carmichael (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 72. Hereafter cited as *Heptaplus*, 178–180 [72].

⁴³ These themes are: the elemental world and natural philosophy (corruptible things in Aristotelian physics); the celestial world (the nature and function of the ten heavenly spheres); the angelic and invisible world (the intellectual sphere via the angelic metaphysics of Pseudo-Dionysius); man and the human world; the vertical hierarchy of the cosmos; the affinity of all worlds in the Trinity; cabala and *felicitas*. See Black, *Pico's Heptaplus*, 26–54.

⁴⁴ “We shall add only this, that the mutual containment of the worlds is also indicated by the Holy Scriptures, both where it is written in the Psalms, ‘Who made the heavens in understanding,’ and where we read that the angels of God are spirits and his ministers a flame of burning fire. Hence celestial or even earthly names are often given to divine things, which are presented figuratively, now as stars, now as wheels and animals, now as elements; hence, also, heavenly names are often given to earthly things. Bound by the chains of concord, all these worlds exchange natures as well as names with mutual liberality. From this principle (in case anyone has not yet understood it) flows the science of all allegorical interpretation.” *Heptaplus*, 190–192 [78–79]. See also Black, *Pico's Heptaplus*, 161.

Here Pico directly links the core principle of his *philosophia nova*—that all spheres of existence (“mundi”) contain each other—to the semantics of allegory, which is the most basic sphere in which the mind can perceive and experience mutual containment. The significance of this is expressed in the penultimate sentence: “Quoniam scilicet astricti vinculis concordiae uti naturas ita etiam appellationes hi omnes mundi mutua sibi liberalitate condonant.” Pico alludes to the kind of freedom and multipotentiality that is associated with his *Oratio*—the exchange of natures and names, the possibility of free movement between spheres of existence. This freedom reveals itself to us in the form of what seem like “chains”—allegorical correspondences bind particular words together in a strict harmony, but this very binding constitutes the words’ freedom to “exchange natures” and signify each other figuratively. Words are able to freely exchange their natures precisely *because* they are bound together by allegorical correspondence. This is how allegory is at the heart of Pico’s philosophy of mind, for it is only in perceiving the interplay of metaphorical levels that the human mind can perceive the connections between the ontological levels of the created world. If a reader can simultaneously apprehend the universal nature of a word (figuratively) and its particular nature (literally), he or she is able to perceive the free “exchange” between the two—a play which *is* the principle of mutual containment.

Pico addresses this by discussing Moses, and the prophet’s use of words as the author of Genesis. Bear in mind that the upshot of the *Heptaplus* is that Moses expresses “all knowledge” in an allegorical form in the words of Genesis, with the six days of creation and the seventh day of rest as the literal order of creation that corresponds allegorically to the levels of emanation from God in the cosmos.⁴⁵ Each part of Genesis contains the whole, just as in the actual six days each of God’s creative acts expressed His “whole” in sequentially more complex spheres, each whole being more variegated than the previous one, but in all cases the same original whole. In terms of theory of allegory, Pico’s point is that the particulars expressed in the literal sense must be *simultaneously* understood in figurative terms (i.e., as universals) in order for their freedom (to be both natures) to show itself in the human mind. This is most significantly encapsulated in Moses’s use of a mundane vocabulary rather than a metaphysical one:

⁴⁵ See Michael J. B. Allen, “The Birth Day of Venus,” in *Pico della Mirandola: New Essays*, ed. M. V. Dougherty (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 107–108.

Cur gratia exempli dicturus Moses de agente causa et de materia, non illam agentem expressis verbis, hanc materiam vocavit, sed caelum et terram; et materiae dispositionis non qualitates, ut dicunt philosophi, sed aquas, et formam lucem potius quam formam appellavit; cometas item et fulmina et cetera id genus, non propriis cognominibus, sed astra et stellas nominavit atque ita de reliquis.⁴⁶

Metaphysics deals in universals, whereas Moses describes particulars. But again, Pico maintains that Genesis expresses the “exact image of the world,”⁴⁷ and thus each particular corresponds allegorically to the whole of the world.⁴⁸ Moses is thus a *theologus-poeta* whose use of allegory represents the pinnacle of knowledge—his account of the six days of creation expresses all things simultaneously, and to decipher it one must be capable of interpreting simultaneously on different levels of meaning.⁴⁹ Genesis, both God’s act and Moses’s words representing that act, perfectly express all the mutually containing levels of creation, and the most educated of Pico’s readers would be able to simultaneously understand the historical picture created by the literal sense of the book, and the metaphorical and ontological interconnectedness of God’s things and Moses’s words.

Pico is clearly a strong Neoplatonist who relishes (with Augustine and contemporaries like Ficino) the free discovery of allegorical meaning behind the letter, and is generally dismissive of the literal sense. His exegetical works are indeed overtly constructed on Platonic themes: through allegory, a text can reflect the order of the cosmos, and man (as hypostasis) can unveil this order by interpreting the meanings contained in words and mapping their correspondences. This is the main register of Pico’s exegetical works: his *Expositiones in Psalmos* (begun in 1488), which downplays, though not entirely, the literal in favor of the moral edification

⁴⁶ “Why, for example, when about to speak of the active cause and of matter, does Moses not call the former active and the latter matter in explicit terms, instead of ‘sky’ and ‘earth’? And the dispositions of matter not qualities, as the philosophers call them, but ‘waters’? And form ‘light’ rather than ‘form,’ and comets and bolts of lightning and other things of that sort not by their proper names but ‘stars’ and ‘planets’ and so on with the rest?” *Heptaplus*, 192 [94]. See also Black, *Pico’s Heptaplus*, 162.

⁴⁷ *Heptaplus*, general proem 2, 192–4 [79].

⁴⁸ I.e., Moses “ex professo de rerum omnium emanatione a Deo, de gradu, de numero, de ordine patrium mundanarum altissime philosophatur” (“most loftily philosophizes on the emanation of all things from God, and on the grade, number, and order of the parts of the world”). *Heptaplus*, general proem 1, 176, [71]. See also Allen, “The Birth Day of Venus,” 105, and Black, *Pico’s Heptaplus*, 163.

⁴⁹ See Allen, “The Birth Day of Venus,” 105.

of allegory,⁵⁰ and the *Commento sopra una canzone d'amore* (1485–1486), a commentary on a Neoplatonist love poem by Girolamo Beinivieni. In the latter text, Pico is largely concerned with the contemporary controversy of the “unicity of the intellect,” the union of particular and universal that is experienced when the intellect rises to self-contemplation in a state of *felicitas*—a conjunction of the active intellect with the potential intellect and the “first mind” in God, all expressed in an allegory of the heart’s movement towards love.⁵¹

Despite this predominance of expansive Platonic allegoresis, Pico devoted attention to the letter in a number of ways. The most obvious is his esoteric views on letter symbolism—throughout his works Pico made use of *gematria*,⁵² anagrammatic methods, and *ars combinandi* to bring out the symbolic correspondences between individual letters.⁵³ This reaches a height in the cabalistic section of the *900 Theses*, where he dissects words into individual letters and even letter strokes to eke out meaning,⁵⁴ and in the final book of the *Heptaplus*, in which he uses combinatory methods to decipher the whole of Genesis as it is expressed in the first word (*bereshit*) and first letter of the book. In our overview of the development of medieval literalism, however, we emphasized the growing interest in the “particularity” of literal meaning in connection to authorial intention—not the esoteric meanings as deciphered by Cabala and other tools, but rather the specific meanings of words when used in

⁵⁰ Pico refers to the literal sense thus (referring to an “introduction” to the work that does not survive): “Litterales psalmi huius expositiones accipi plures possunt ex antiquis expositoribus, Augustino, Hieronymo, aliis, quod et supra in argumento et tituli expositione tetigimus. Allegoricum autem sensum tractare magis opere pretium duco cum in hoc psalmo tum in sequentibus psalmis, quemadmodum et in introductorio polliciti sumus...” (“The literal commentaries on this Psalm are able to take many things from the ancient commentators, Augustine, Jerome and others, which we also touched on above in our explanation of the title and argument. I think, however, that it is more rewarding to deal with the allegorical sense, both in this Psalm and in the following ones, as indeed we promised in the introduction”). Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Expositiones in Psalmos*, ed. A. Raspanti (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1997), 114. Translated in Black, *Pico’s Heptaplus*, 90 (see also 152).

⁵¹ See Black, *Pico’s Heptaplus*, 193–196, and Allen, “The Birth Day of Venus,” 81–104.

⁵² I.e., a system of numerical value and correspondence between letters.

⁵³ See Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 63–66.

⁵⁴ I.e., thesis 28.33: “Nullae sunt litterae in tota lege quae in formis, coniunctionibus, separationibus, tortuositate, directione, defectu, superabundantia, minoritate, maioritate, coronatione, clausura, apertura, et ordine, decem numerationum secreta non manifestent” (“There are no letters in the whole Law which in their forms, conjunctions, separations, crookedness, straightness, defect, excess, smallness, largeness, crowning, closure, openness, and order, do not reveal the secrets of the ten numerations”). Translated in Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 359–359.

specific contexts by historical individuals. Pico's reaction to this trend is seen more clearly in his engagement with philology. In the *Expositiones in Psalmos* Pico adopts a rigorous, albeit conventional, philological method, comparing four translations of the Psalms in order to find the best interpretations of individual passages and words.⁵⁵ This interest in contemporary philology, aligning him in ways with Gianozzo Manetti and Lorenzo Valla, reflects Pico's strongly reconciliative approach: however Platonist his exegesis was, Pico was well-versed in scholastic thought and Paduan Aristotelianism, and pays due attention in the *Expositiones in Psalmos* to philology and the four Aristotelian senses.

This said, however, Pico's philological interests were relatively conservative, in that his comparison of translations in the *Expositiones in Psalmos* works to defend the already established Christian versions of the Bible.⁵⁶ Generally, his stance on the "particularity" of words is demonstrated better by his sensitivity to the "customs" and modes of speech that are used in different texts. In the *Heptaplus*, Pico's justification for his cabalistic interpretations is an awareness of the individual author, Moses, and his special use of figurative language: "Cum splendorem disciplinae mosaicae ferre non possent, oportuit velata facie verba facere illis" ("Moses had to speak with a veiled face, lest those whom he was undertaking to enlighten be blinded by so much light").⁵⁷ This is due to his divinely ordained status, which allowed him to "orationem disponere ut eadem verba, idem contextus, eadem series totius scripturae figurandis mundorum omnium et totius naturae secretis apte conveniat" ("arrange his discourse so that the same words, the same context, and the same order in the whole passage are completely suitable for symbolizing the secrets of all the worlds and of the whole of nature").⁵⁸

Pico is again writing from within a cabalistic framework, according to which Moses, like the other prophets and Jesus after them,⁵⁹ veiled

⁵⁵ Pico glosses and compares words in the Septuagint, the Hebrew Psalter, the Gallician Psalter, and the *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos*, generally deferring to the authority of the Septuagint. See Black, *Pico's Heptaplus*, 84–88.

⁵⁶ See Black, *Pico's Heptaplus*, 88. We might also mention here Pico's critique of humanist philology as a vacuous *scientia nominum* in his 1485 correspondence with Ermolao Barbaro. See Garin, *Italian Humanism*, 102.

⁵⁷ *Heptaplus*, second exposition, proem, 222 [94]. See also Michael Sudduth, "Pico della Mirandola's Philosophy of Religion," in *Pico della Mirandola: New Essays*, ed. Dougherty, 61–80, 69.

⁵⁸ *Heptaplus*, proem to the second book, 222 [94–95].

⁵⁹ Pico extends this to Jesus in the *Oratio*, ed. Garin, 156. See also Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 71.

profound truths in their allegories, and kept secret the system that uncovers these truths (i.e., they only transmitted it orally). But the distinguishing factor here is not the figurative nature of their language in particular, but the secret cabalistic tradition that reveals the uniquely perfect and harmonious correspondences between words. On Pico's account *all* language is necessarily figurative: all words have various meanings corresponding to the different levels of reality, and all texts express these levels in "their own way." Although the allegories of Moses are divinely harmonized to perfectly express the correspondences between different levels of reality, these profound truths can also be found by interpreting the less perfect allegories of Plato,⁶⁰ just as the interpretation of a contemporary poem by Benevieni yields the important doctrines of the unicity of the intellect and the intellectual ascent of *felicitas*. For Pico, all words are figurative extensions of meaning, and all texts can be made to yield Platonic and Christian truths, but only by taking into account the different individual statuses of authors, as Pico does in the *900 Theses*, dividing Western thought into historical "sects" and comparing them collectively, can we truly see that biblical and pagan authors collectively say the same things ("all things") in their texts.

Thus far, I have emphasized the reconciliative nature of Pico's approach to allegory—he repeatedly returns to the expansive Platonic allegory of emanation, but at the same time focuses on how these allegories are contained in individual letters, and on how different modes of speech express the same truths in different ways. This puts Pico somewhere in between the two extremes of scholastic Aristotelianism and the Platonic humanism of Florence. However interested he is in individual letters and the authorial and historical contexts of words, he is nowhere near the strict literalism of his day, exemplified most appropriately by Girolamo Savonarola, who in his *Opus perutile*, as mentioned above, demonstrates a close adherence to the Thomistic doctrine of the letter: the literal sense *is* authorial intention, and we must use it as the starting point for all interpretations and arguments.⁶¹ At the same time, Pico's free discovery of allegorical significance does not quite match the Orphic and Platonic

⁶⁰ As Pico puts it, "Plato noster ita, involucre aenigmatum, fabularum velamine, mathematicis imaginibus et subobscuris recedentium sensum indiciis, sua dogmata occultavit..." ("Plato himself concealed his doctrines beneath coverings of allegory, veils of myth, mathematical images, and unintelligible signs of fugitive reasoning"). *Heptaplus*, first proem, 172 [69]. See also Sudduth, "Pico della Mirandola's Philosophy of Religion," 69.

⁶¹ On this see Alistair J. Minnis, "Fifteenth-Century Versions of Thomistic Literalism: Girolamo Savonarola and Alfonso de Madrigal," 163–179.

devotion of someone like Marsilio Ficino in his *De amore*, a commentary on Plato's *Symposium*.⁶²

This picture of Pico in the middle of the competing contemporary attitudes on allegory is in agreement with what we know about his truly broad interests and knowledge, and it is not a surprising stance for a figure who very consistently maintained a syncretist project of reconciliation throughout his works. What I want to emphasize is that in taking this middle ground of both allegorical interpretation and attention to the letter and to individual authors' "modes of speech," Pico is in fact not backing away from either Aristotelian literalism or Platonic allegorizing, but rather is taking both poles to their extremes in order to show that they are one and the same when taken to these heights. In my survey of the medieval commentary tradition, I outlined the intellectual arc between Augustine's favoring of allegorical meaning and Aquinas's definition of the *sensus litteralis* as the ground of all legitimate interpretation. But the late medieval literalist vogue had the effect of actually diluting the concept of the literal to a point of vagueness. The often repeated affirmations that the literal sense of words "contains" all other senses, like the moral and anagogical, collectively beg the question of what "sense" actually remains to distinguish a literal meaning from the figurative meanings that it is meant to express.

This pushes exegetes to apparent contradictions like the *duplex sensus litteralis*, mentioned above, in which the affirmation of the letter's containment of figurative meanings does away with the privileged connection between "proper meaning" and the adjective "literal." We find this in the work of the staunchest of literalists, Nicholas of Lyre, and yet the *duplex sensus* paradoxically returns Nicholas to the Augustinian distinction between "proper" and "figurative" meanings, and by saying that *both* are literal he places the onus on the interpreter's ability to connect the two, again in Augustinian fashion.⁶³ While it is easy to categorize this sort

⁶² Pico's divergence from Ficino is seen most plainly in his favoring of the Psalms and Genesis, rather than the works of Plato, as the most important subjects of allegorical interpretation—a favoring of tradition and the poetic and theological distinctiveness of the words of the prophets. See Allen, "The Birth Day of Venus," 103–104. On the more specific breaks between Ficino and Pico (on the "Being" and "One" controversy; on the unicity of the intellect; on magic), see Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 25–29; 112–114; 115–132.

⁶³ Extracts from Nicholas of Lyre's *Postilla Litteralis* translated in Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 266–276. See also Black's own very pertinent discussion of Nicholas, emphasizing precisely the fact that Nicholas's literalism aimed at connecting, not dividing, all the senses to the letter—strengthening the prestige of the literal by working to exhaust its connections to figurative meaning (*Pico's Heptaplus*, 119–120).

of thing as a convenient manipulation of academic vocabulary, in a figure like Pico della Mirandola, we see how this technical play on the concept of interpretive certainty and the literal is at the heart of a concrete and influential philosophical position. Pico's syncretist approach is deliberately a "culminative" approach, always looking to openly confront and reconcile any disagreements or contradictions in divergent traditions. In step with this, Pico's engagement with hermeneutics and allegory takes up the late medieval issue of the literal sense in a way that foregrounds the expansion of the term's connections to allegorical meanings. His own version of something like the *duplex sensus* comes in the *Expositiones in Psalmos* discussed above. Pico makes use of the four conventional "senses" of allegory (literal, moral, allegorical, anagogical), but in his "literal expositions" he often pairs the proper and moral meanings of passages, in a way that Crofton Black describes as a dual "literal-historical" and "literal-moral" exegesis.⁶⁴ Elsewhere in this work, Pico freely expands the categories of interpretive "senses," adding an *expositio naturalis* to his commentary on Psalm 18 and an *expositio physica* for Psalm 47.⁶⁵ These glosses are meant to describe the most basic natural and physical events and "truths" of the Psalms—like Nicholas of Lyre, Pico works to specify his vocabulary into precise units of interpretive certainty, but all in the context of a Neoplatonist allegorical exegesis.

This sort of experimentation with exegesis gives way to the more concrete theory of allegory in the *Heptaplus*, which Pico presents in connection to core concepts of his philosophical approach. In a study of the *Heptaplus* that we have made use of above, Crofton Black comprehensively analyzes this allegorical theory and shows how the tradition of biblical hermeneutics plays a decisive role in Pico's conception of mutual containment and *felicitas*. Black does address Pico's approach to the literal

For a very clear description of how the *duplex sensus* works in Nicholas of Lyre's commentary on the *Song of Songs*, see Mary Dove, "Literal Senses in the Song of Songs," in *Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture*, eds. Philip D. W. Krey and Lesley Smith (Leiden: Boston: Brill, 2000), 129–146.

⁶⁴ Pico gives literal expositions of Psalms 6, 10, 11, and 47. In the case of Psalm 17, the blurry distinction between a moral and historical reading is in reference to verse 8, where the historical situation of the speaker, David, is aligned with the moral meaning of the passage. See Black, *Pico's Heptaplus*, 89–90. Pico's treatment of both the historical and moral meanings of the text as "literal" is very much in the same vein as Nicholas of Lyre's use of the *duplex sensus literalis* in a gloss regarding Solomon, as described in Minnis and Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 205–206.

⁶⁵ *Expositiones in Psalmos*, ed. Raspani, 178–188 (Psalm 18) and 218–222 (Psalm 47). See also Black, *Pico's Heptaplus*, 91.

sense in the works discussed above—in particular with reference to esotericism—and he does refer briefly to the late medieval expansion of the literal.⁶⁶ My purpose has been to more explicitly connect this expansion to Pico's thought, both in the specifics of his exegetical works, but also more broadly in his syncretism. The progressive tendency to approach pagan and scriptural authors on the same terms, and the concomitant interest in "human authorship" are the key trends of the late medieval commentary tradition, and these trends come to something of a fruition in Pico's *philosophia nova*. The *900 Theses* reflect an ethics of free reconciliation of disparate traditions of thought, and the introductory *Oration* connects this project to "human authorship" by way of the topic of intellectual ascent. *Felicitas* was frequently discussed with reference to the same prophets who generated interest in human authorship—particularly Solomon, whose *Song of Songs* was interpreted as an allegory of the ascent achieved through contemplative theology.⁶⁷

In sum, the trends associated with the later medieval commentary tradition are in line with key concepts in Pico's thought on the micro-level (his theory of allegory and mutual containment) and the macro-level (his overall reconciliative goals). Earlier I insisted upon a kind of non-representationalist idea of a "background" to describe the infusion of the play on the concept of the literal into Pico's intellectual context. I did this precisely to emphasize how the literal works on both the smaller and larger levels in his thought. That is, I wanted to review how he dealt overtly with the letter in his important theory of allegory, but also to suggest more generally that his syncretist goals and his philosophy of mind ("mutual containment") reflect the very paradox that Minnis describes as the "high-water mark" of literalism—the expansion of the term "literal" to the point that it is connected to all meaning, and thus flirts with a loss of singularity (the *duplex sensus*). Here, a technical and interpretive term for "meaning" is popularized to the point of loosing its particularity, in a way that is connected to a broader cultural location of certainty in human thought and language. This "strange loop" of the literal is the precedent for Pico's union of the letter and allegory, and more generally for his exuberantly holistic philosophy of containment.

⁶⁶ Black, *Pico's Heptapplus*, 236.

⁶⁷ See Black's own discussion of this in relation to Gersonides's commentary on the *Song of Songs*, *Pico's Heptapplus*, 205–211. For examples of the *Song of Songs* as "contemplative theology" in the *Glossa ordinaria*, see *The Glossa Ordinaria on the Song of Songs*, ed. and trans. Mary Dove (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), 2–5.

I will close with a loosely related but relevant quote by Baxter Hathaway:

Literary critics in all ages have assumed that poetry is some kind of reconciliation of the universal and particular, but the important question for any given period is the extent to which the taste and metaphysics of the time move the emphasis one way or the other from dead center.⁶⁸

This quote is from a discussion of literary criticism in the sixteenth century, but I think it is appropriate for what I am suggesting. It reflects how we have drawn together early literary criticism and intellectual history, and Hathaway's immanent tone reflects Pico's own awareness of the interdependence of contradictory positions. We have looked at how the medieval commentary tradition's vacillating stance on the literal provides a language for the push and pull of the "taste and metaphysics" over the centuries, and how this very vacillation is at the heart of Pico's cognitive model and his wider reconciliative goals. The literal and allegorical senses are only intelligible in relation to each other, and this mutual dependence is Pico's basic trope for the "chains of liberty" that are present in the most basic act of interpretation and in the most expansive harmonization of thought.

⁶⁸ Baxter Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism: The Late Renaissance in Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), 130.

PART FOUR

LITERARY HISTORY

FUROR AND PHILOLOGY IN THE POETICS OF ANGELO POLIZIANO

James K. Coleman

Marsilio Ficino was a man of many intellectual gifts. His linguistic skills enabled him to translate the massive complete works of Plato and Plotinus, along with many other Greek philosophical texts, at a time when few, even among the educated elite, achieved any knowledge of Greek. His personal charisma allowed him to attract many of the most notable and powerful men of Laurentian Florence into his circle of students, followers, and fellow admirers of Plato. Arguably the most decisive factor behind his influence, however, was his intuitive grasp of the intellectual predilections and spiritual needs of his Florentine contemporaries, along with an ability to identify and promote precisely those elements of ancient philosophy that would resonate within Florentine society. When his readings of Platonic, Neoplatonic, Orphic and Hermetic texts yielded a concept congenial to his project of philosophical and spiritual renewal, Ficino would make the concept his own, tirelessly revisiting it in his letters, commentaries, and original philosophical tracts.

One well-known example that will be a central focus of this essay is the theory of poetic frenzy (or *furor poeticus*) that Ficino adapted from Plato, and in particular from the *Phaedrus* and the *Ion*. Ficino's readings of Plato led him to embrace the idea that great poetry is produced not by learned poets who craft verse through skill and patient labor, but by individuals who are seized by uncontrolled inspiration and relinquish their normal faculties to act as a mouthpiece for a divine voice. Ficino began championing this Platonic concept early in his career: his first full-scale tract devoted to the topic, entitled *De divino furore*, dates from 1457, when Ficino was only twenty-four years old. He would revisit the theme throughout his life, most notably in the *Theologia platonica* and the *De amore*, but also in his commentary on the *Phaedrus*, his introduction to the *Ion*, and numerous letters. Thanks to Ficino's efforts, the *furor poeticus* became a central element in the discourse about poetry in late Quattrocento Florence, as is clearly demonstrated by its appearance in theoretical tracts by Cristoforo Landino and Bartolomeo Fonzio, and in poems by Lorenzo de' Medici, Naldo Naldi, and, most notably, Angelo Poliziano.

Since all of these men were themselves authors of verse, it is perhaps understandable that they should have been drawn to Ficino's theory of poetic frenzy because of the high status that it afforded poetry as the product of divine inspiration. Yet from another point of view Ficino's theory of poetry is deeply incompatible with the realities of late Quattrocento poetic composition. As is well known, the poetry of the humanists was based largely on the imitation of classical models, a type of composition that advertised its author's erudition and skill. The Ficinian dichotomy that privileged poetry created through frenzy over poetry created through artifice would clearly relegate Quattrocento humanist verse to the second, less prestigious category. A passage from Ficino's introduction to his translation of Plato's *Ion* illustrates this dichotomy well:

Non igitur arte humana, sed divina quadam infusione proferunt [poetae] . . . Praeterea saepe videmus rudem hominem et ineptum subito in poetam bonum evadere et aliquid magnificum divinumque cantare . . . Deus . . . saepe ineptos quosdam potius quam urbanos, insanos potius quam prudentes rapit, ne si acutis prudentibusque viris ad haec uteretur, humana subtilitate et industria fieri haec existimarentur.¹

Perhaps surprisingly, the learned and prudent men who constituted the literary elite in Florence during this period did not explicitly criticize Ficino's idea that study and technique are at best unnecessary for, and at worst an obstacle to, the production of great poetry. Ficino's detractors attacked his ideas on other grounds, while his closest allies, such as Cristoforo Landino, adopted Ficino's version of the theory of poetic frenzy enthusiastically and largely without modification. One of the few writers who engaged with Ficino's theory in a sophisticated and nuanced way was Angelo Poliziano. Poliziano neither rejected the Platonic theory of poetic frenzy nor accepted Ficino's interpretation of it uncritically. As this study will seek to demonstrate, the theory of divine frenzy engaged Poliziano's thought throughout his life. Taking Ficino's writings as a starting point, but refusing to regard them, or even Plato's dialogues themselves, as the

¹ "So it is not by human art but by a divine infusion that poets produce poetry . . . Moreover, we often see a man who is uneducated and [even] stupid suddenly emerge as a good poet, and sing something magnificent and divine . . . God often seizes hold of certain unsophisticated men rather than urbane ones, men who are out of their minds rather than prudent men. And He does this to prevent men from supposing that poetry is achieved by human subtlety and application—something that would happen were He to employ clever and prudent men for it." Marsilio Ficino, *Commentaries on Plato, Phaedrus and Ion*, ed. and trans. Michael J. B. Allen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), vol. 1, 202–205.

final word on the subject, he revised his own understanding of the phenomenon of poetic frenzy throughout his career, striving to arrive at a personal interpretation capable of overcoming the flaws he identified in Ficino's treatment of the subject.²

Among Ficino's Florentine contemporaries, Poliziano was arguably the best equipped to critically assess Ficino's revival of this Platonic theory, for several reasons. First, as a poet in both Italian and Latin, Poliziano far outstripped even his fellow humanists in his use of erudite allusion and imitation. Hence in his case it is particularly clear that an uncritical adherence to a theoretical framework that devalues the role of skill and erudition in the composition of poetry would have been an incoherent position.

Second, Poliziano was on familiar terms with Ficino for essentially his whole life, but he was only a student of the older humanist for a brief period in his youth and always retained complete intellectual independence from Ficino.³ He was attracted by Neoplatonic thought in his early years, yet the philosophical tradition beloved by Ficino was never Poliziano's primary interest. Indeed later in life he frequently proclaimed his preference for Aristotle over Plato, and ultimately lectured on Aristotle at

² The most important scholarly discussions of Poliziano's views on *furor poeticus* are in Vittore Branca, *Poliziano e l'umanesimo della parola* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), esp. 15 and 33–34; Peter Godman, "Poliziano's Poetics and Literary History," *Interpres* 13 (1993): 110–209; idem, *From Poliziano to Machiavelli: Florentine Humanism in the High Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), esp. 31–79; Donatella Coppini, "L'ispirazione per contagio: 'furor' e 'remota lectio' nella poesia latina del Poliziano," in *Angelo Poliziano: poeta, scrittore, filologo. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi. Montepulciano 3–6 novembre 1994*, ed. Vincenzo Fera and Mario Martelli (Florence: Le Lettere, 1998), 127–164. For the theory of poetic inspiration in Plato and ancient Greek philosophy, see E. N. Tigerstedt, "The Poet as Creator: Origins of a Metaphor," *Comparative Literature Studies* 5:4 (1968): 455–488; idem, "Plato's Idea of Poetical Inspiration," *Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum: Societas Scientiarum Fennica* 44:2 (1969); idem, "Furor Poeticus: Poetic Inspiration in Greek Literature before Democritus and Plato," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 31:2 (1970): 163–178. On the fortune of the theory in the Middle Ages, see E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Bollingen, 1953), 474–475. On Ficino's interpretation of *furor poeticus*, see, especially, Michael J. B. Allen, "Poetic Madness," *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 41–67; idem, "The Soul as Rhapsode: Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's *Ion*," in *Humanity and Divinity in Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. John W. O'Malley, Thomas M. Izbicki, and Gerald Christianson (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993); Paola Megna, *Lo Ione platonico nella Firenze medicea* (Messina: Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Umanistici, 1999); Sebastiano Gentile, "In margine all'epistola 'De divino furore' di Marsilio Ficino," *Rinascimento*, 2nd ser., 23 (1983): 33–77.

³ See Ida Maier, *Angé Politien; la formation d'un poète humaniste (1469–1480)* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1966).

Florence's Studio. In the "Coronide" that concludes the *Miscellaneorum centuria prima*, Poliziano looks back on his youthful philosophical studies under Ficino and Argyropoulos:

Etenim ego tenera adhuc aetate, sub duobus excellentissimis hominibus, Marsilio Ficino Florentino, cuius longe felicior, quam Thracensis Orphei cithara veram (ni fallor) Euridicen, hoc est, amplissimi iudicii Platoniam sapientiam, revocavit ab inferis, & Argyropilo Byzantio Peripateticorum sui temporis longe clarissimo, dabam quidem philosophiae utrique operam, sed non admodum assiduam, videlicet ad Homeri poetae blandimenta natura, & aetate proclivior, quem tum latine quoque miro, ut adulescens, ardore, miro studio versibus interpretabar. Postea vero rebus aliis, negotiisque prementibus, sic ego nonnunquam de philosophia, quasi de Nilo canes, bibi, fugique...⁴

The passage is interesting for several reasons. Poliziano, writing in 1489, is in effect suggesting what sort of influence Ficino exerted on his early career—essentially, that his studies under Ficino provided him with a working knowledge of Platonic philosophy, but did not make of him a devotee of Ficino's Platonic revival. Poliziano's claim that he was drawn, as a youth, more to the poetry of Homer than to the philosophy of Ficino and Argyropoulos is substantiated by the facts. Indeed, Poliziano had originally succeeded in attracting the attention and support of Ficino himself and Lorenzo de' Medici in 1470 when, at the age of fifteen, he presented to the latter his translation of the second book of the *Iliad* into Latin hexameters. The Homeric translation project continued to occupy most of his scholarly energies from 1470 to 1475, during which time he translated books two through five of the *Iliad*.⁵

When Poliziano, in the above quote from the *Miscellanea*, declares Ficino's lyre superior to that of Orpheus because it has succeeded in

⁴ Angelo Poliziano, *Opera omnia* (Basel, 1553), fascimile edition, ed. Ida Maier (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmo, 1971), 310. "And indeed, still at a tender age, I studied both philosophical schools, under two most excellent men: the Florentine Marsilio Ficino, whose lyre, much more felicitous than that of Orpheus the Thracian, has called back from the underworld the true Eurydice (that is, the Platonic wisdom of most broad judgment), and the Byzantine Argyropoulos, by far the most famous of the Aristotelians of his day. I did not, however, study with great constancy, since I was clearly more inclined (both by nature and because of my young age) to the charms of the poet Homer, whom I was then translating into Latin verses with the wondrous zeal of an adolescent and with wondrous eagerness. Afterwards, however, with other matters and affairs pressing, I have thus sometimes drunk from the waters of philosophy and fled, as dogs do from the Nile." The English translation is my own.

⁵ Alice Levine Rubenstein, "Imitation and Style in Angelo Poliziano's *Iliad* Translation," *Renaissance Quarterly* 36: 1 (Spring 1983): 48–70.

resurrecting the true Eurydice—Platonic wisdom—, he is employing a variation of a topos that had become ubiquitous among the writers of Ficino's milieu. Ficino's friends frequently address him as Orpheus in letters and compare him to Orpheus in poetic works, and the centrality of this mythological figure to Ficino's vision emerges unmistakably from his own writings. Ficino was fascinated by the various myths about Orpheus—the accounts of his ability to charm beasts and move trees, stones, and rivers with his song, the story of his quest to rescue Eurydice from the underworld, his dismemberment at the hands of the Maenads. The Orpheus myths, recounted by Ovid, Virgil, Horace, Boethius, and other Latin writers, had continued to exert considerable influence throughout the Middle Ages. Thanks to his Greek proficiency and access to manuscripts, however, Ficino was among the first in post-classical Italy to form an understanding of Orpheus based not only on these myths but also on a comprehensive study of the texts which Orpheus was thought to have authored: the *Orphic Hymns*, the *Orphic Argonautica*, and the fragments attributed to Orpheus quoted by Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Proclus, and others.⁶ Identifying in these writings various gems of philosophical wisdom that seemed to anticipate theological truths consistent with Christianity, Ficino hailed Orpheus (along with Hermes Trismegistus, Pythagoras, and Plato) as part of a series of ancient sages who had benefited from a pre-Christian revelation—secondary in importance to that given to the Jews, but nevertheless profound.

The Orphic strand of Ficino's thought stands out in particular prominence when he turns his speculation to the subjects of poetry and music. Ficino's Orphism was in fact not only a theoretical matter, but involved the actual cultivation of "Orphic" poetry: Ficino was in the habit of giving musical performances in which he would intone his Latin verse

⁶ D. P. Walker, "Orpheus the Theologian and Renaissance Platonists," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 16 (1953): 103. This study was subsequently revised and published as the chapter "Orpheus the Theologian" in Walker's book *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (London: Duckworth, 1972). For Ficino's Orphism, see also John Warden, "Orpheus and Ficino" in *Orpheus: The Metamorphoses of a Myth*, ed. John Warden (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982); Patrizia Castelli, "Orphica," in *Il lume del sole: Marsilio Ficino medico dell'anima*, ed. Patrizia Castelli et al. (Florence: Opus Libri, 1984), 51–64; André Chastel, *Marsile Ficin et l'art* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1996), esp. 187–195; Angelo Voss, "Orpheus redivivus: The Musical Magic of Marsilio Ficino," in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. Michael J. B. Allen and Valery Rees with Martin Davies (Boston: Brill, 2002), 227–241; Ilana Klutstein, *Marsilio Ficino et la Théologie Ancienne. Oracles Chaldaïques—Hymnes Orphiques—Hymnes de Proclus* (Florence: Olschki, 1987).

translations of the *Orphic Hymns*, accompanying himself on an instrument that he referred to as his "Orphic lyre." During the course of these performances he was known to affect a state of rapture—a "poetic frenzy."⁷ Poliziano refers to Ficino's performing style in his 1473 elegy to Bartolomeo Fonzio:

Saepe graves pellit docta testudine curas,
 Et vocem argutis suggerit articulis,
 Qualis Apollinei modulator carminis Orpheus
 Dicitur Odrysias allicuisse feras.
 Marmaricos posset cantu mulcere leones,
 Quasque niger tigres semper Amanus habet,
 Caucaseo traheret duras e vertice cautes
 Saxaque Sicaniis condita gurgitibus.
 Hinc, ubi conticuit, Musarum concitus oestro,
 Deferor ad solitos protinus ipse Lares
 Atque iterum meditor numeros Phoebumque lacesso
 Attonitusque sacram pectine plango chelym.⁸

Beyond the evident effort at flattery, these verses demonstrate that the young Poliziano understood that Ficino's tendency to self-identify as an Orpheus figure was, in Ficino's own mind, intimately connected with his revival of the theory of divine frenzy. The following pages will summarize Ficino's views on frenzy, and the related but distinct Neoplatonic poetics of his close collaborator Cristoforo Landino, in order to reach a better understanding of how Poliziano ultimately developed his own theory of poetic inspiration in contrast to the versions of his older colleagues.

In the *De amore* Ficino asserts that Orpheus was inspired not only by the poetic frenzy, but by the other three Platonic frenzies as well. The passage is worth examining in detail, for it illustrates the connection that Ficino theorized between the four categories of divine frenzy.

⁷ See D. P. Walker, "Le chant orphique de Marsile Ficin," in *Musique et poésie au XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Colloques internationaux du CNRS, 1953), 17–28.

⁸ Quoted here are vv. 181–192 of the elegy as published by Ida Maier, *Ange Politien*, 75. "[Marsilio Ficino] often drives away heavy cares with his learned lyre, and produces a voice with his melodious fingers. Just as Orpheus, the composer of Apollonian song, is said to have charmed the Thracian beasts, so [Ficino] would be able to calm African lions with his singing, and the tigresses which the black Amanus always holds, and he could drag hard rocks off a peak of the Caucasus, and the stones concealed by the Sicilian whirlpools. From here, when he has fallen silent, inflamed by the frenzy of the Muses, I am immediately carried back home to my usual hearth-gods, and again I ponder rhythms and provoke Phoebus and, inspired, I strike the sacred lyre with a plectrum." The English translation is my own.

Furor autem diuinus est qui ad supera tollit, ut in eius definitione consistit. Quatuor ergo diuini furoris sunt speties. Primus quidem poeticus furor, alter mysterialis, tertius uaticinium, amatorius affectus est quartus... Poetico ergo furore primum opus est, qui per musicos tonos que torpent suscitet, per harmonicam suauitatem que turbantur mulceat, per diuersorum denique cononantiam dissonantem pellat discordiam et uarias partes animi temperet. Neque satis hoc est. Multitudo enim adhuc restat in animo. Accedit ergo mysterium ad Dionysium pertinens, quod expiationibus sacrisque et omni cultu diuino, partium omnium intentionem in mentem, qua deus colitur, dirigit. Unde cum singule animi partes ad unam mentem redacte sint, iam totum quoddam unum ex pluribus factus est animus. Tertio uero adhuc opus est furore, qui mentem ad unitatem ipsam, anime caput, reducat. Hoc Apollo per uaticinium efficit. Nam cum anima supra mentem in unitatem surgit, futura presagit. Demum cum anima facta est unum, unum, inquam, quod in ipsa natura et essentia anime est, restat ut illico in unum, quod est super essentiam, id est, deum se reuocet. Hoc celestis illa Venus per amorem, id est, diuine pulchritudinis desiderium bonique ardorem explet... Omnibus iis furoribus occupatum fuisse Orpheum libri eius testimonio esse possunt.⁹

The four divine frenzies are, for Ficino, principally phases in an individual's contemplative ascent to God.¹⁰ The way Ficino understands the stages

⁹ Marsilio Ficino, *Commentaire sur Le Banquet de Platon, de l'amour*, ed. Pierre Laurens (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2002), 241–45. The passage is in speech 7, chapter 14. "The divine madness is that which raises to higher things, as is established in its definition. Therefore there are four species of divine madness. The first certainly is poetic madness, the second, mysterial, the third, prophecy, the fourth, amatory feeling... Therefore first there is need for the poetic madness, which, through musical sounds, arouses those parts of the soul which are asleep, through harmonious sweetness calms those which are perturbed, and finally, through the consonance of diverse things, drives away dissonant discord and tempers the various parts of the soul. Nor is this enough. For multiplicity still remains in the soul. There is added, therefore, the mystery pertaining to Dionysus, which by expiation and sacrifices, and every divine worship, directs the attention of all the other parts to the intellect, by which God is worshipped. In this way since all the parts of the soul are reduced to intellect alone, the soul has already been made a certain single whole out of many. But there is still need for a third madness which leads the intellect back to unity itself, the head of the soul. This Apollo brings about through prophecy. For when the soul rises above intellect into unity, it foresees future things. Finally, when the soul has been made one, one, I say, which is in the nature and being of the soul, it remains that it immediately recalls itself to that One which is above being, that is, God. This that celestis Venus completes, through love, that is the desire for the divine beauty and thirst for the Good... That Orpheus was seized by all of these madresses, his books can testify." The English translation is from Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, trans. Sears Jayne (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1985), 170–71.

¹⁰ On Ficino's conviction that Plato's four frenzies should be understood as paths for achieving a real state of altered consciousness, along the lines of that which Porphyry affirms that Plotinus frequently experienced, see Allen, "Poetic Madness," 59–61.

of this Platonic “itinerarium mentis in Deum” depends on his conception of the human soul.

Ficino distinguishes within the human soul numerous distinct faculties, which he groups into the lower, middle, and upper parts of the soul: “All rational Souls have . . . an intellectual head, a rational center, and an animating lower part.”¹¹ The lower part of the soul (which Ficino also refers to as *idolum*) contains the fantasy, sense perception, and the nutritive power. The middle part is the *ratio*. The upper part of the soul is the *mens*, and the very highest element of the *mens* he refers to as the *unitas*. While the *mens* and the *ratio* are both cognitive powers, they differ fundamentally. The *mens*, which humans have in common with the angels, is engaged in a perpetual contemplation of pure ideas. But this contemplation does not inherently involve consciousness—the *mens* generally operates unconsciously, as does, for instance, the nutritive power (causing the heartbeat, etc.). The *ratio*, which only the human soul possesses, allows for discursive thought, and is the carrier of consciousness.¹²

Constrained in the confines of the body, these different parts of the soul generally clash with each other in a state of discord. The function of the poetic frenzy, in these terms, is to bring the parts of the soul into harmony with one another. When this has been accomplished, the frenzy of the mysteries can bring the attention of the whole soul (and especially of the *ratio*, hence consciousness) to focus on the upper part of the soul, the *mens*. Next the prophetic frenzy lifts the attention of the soul higher still, so that consciousness is focused on the very summit of the *mens*, the so-called *unitas*. The *unitas* is the part of the soul that most nearly reflects the transcendent *Unum* of the Neoplatonists—that is, God. Therefore, in Ficino’s interpretation, the soul whose consciousness is focused on its own *unitas* can be elevated by the highest frenzy (that of love) into a direct vision of God.

While this section of the *De amore* explains how Ficino conceptualized the internal experience of the inspired poet, and the role of the poetic frenzy in the ascent of the ladder of contemplation, it does not explain how this inner experience gives rise to outward expression—that is, to the composition of poetry. In his commentary on Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Ficino endeavors to fill this gap:

¹¹ P. O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1964), 369.

¹² On Ficino’s psychology, see Kristeller, *Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, 366–384.

Operae pretium vero post haec fore videtur mysteria quaedam huius praecipua paulo latius explicare, ac primo quae de poesi ceterisque furoribus hic et in *Phaedro* praetermisi nec alibi declaravi. Oportet ad furorem poeticum consequendum, quo et homines divinis moribus instruantur mysteriaque divina canantur, animum futuri poetae sic affectum esse, ut sit quasi tener atque mollis, praeterea ut sit intactus... Quicumque numine quomodolibet occupatur, profecto propter ipsam impulsus divini vehementiam virtutisque plenitudinem exuberat, concitatur, exultat, finesque et mores humanos excedit. Itaque occupatio haec sive raptus furor quidam et alienatio non iniuria nominator. Furens autem nullus est simplici sermone contentus, sed in clamorem prorumpit et cantus et carmina. Quamobrem furor quilibet, sive fatidicus sive mysterialis seu amatorius, dum in cantus procedit et carmina, merito in furorem poeticum videtur absolvi.¹³

Here Ficino clarifies that, in terms of inner experience, the poetic frenzy is the first of the four stages of contemplative ascent, while in terms of outward expression poetic frenzy is the faculty that gives a suitable form (i.e. verse) to the insights achieved through all four of the frenzies. It is the poetic frenzy that enables the individual who has glimpsed divine truths to communicate these truths to his fellow men.

Considering Ficino's theory of poetic frenzy in its broad structure, we can begin to understand why he found the Orpheus figure to be such a useful anchor for his theory: the many mythical and ostensibly historical facets of Orpheus's activity provided Ficino with examples of all of the different functions that he believed the inspired poet should perform. That Orpheus had been able to use a sublimated erotic passion (the frenzy of Love) to achieve an experience of the transcendent was demonstrated, in Ficino's opinion, by the myth of his descent to the underworld out of love for Eurydice, and by the many Orphic writings that praise Love: "Orpheus... amorem in ipsius choas sinu locavit his uerbis:... *Antiquissimum, seipso perfectum, consultissimumque amorem*" ("Orpheus... praised

¹³ "But after this it seems worthwhile to explain some of this book's principal mysteries a little more fully, and first to say something about poetry and the frenzies here and in the *Phaedrus* that I have neglected and not dealt with elsewhere. To achieve poetic frenzy (the frenzy by which men may be instructed in divine ways and the divine mysteries chanted), the rational soul of the future poet must be so affected as to be almost tender and soft and moreover untouched... Whoever experiences any kind of spiritual possession is indeed overflowing on account of the vehemence of the divine impulse and the fullness of its power: he raves, exults, and exceeds the bounds of human behavior. Not unjustly, therefore, this possession or rapture is called frenzy and alienation. But no man possessed is content with simple speech: he bursts forth into clamoring and songs and poems. Any frenzy, therefore—whether the prophetic, hieratic, or amatory—when it proceeds to songs and poems, seems to be released, and properly so, as poetic frenzy." Ficino, *Commentaries on Plato, Phaedrus and Ion*, vol. 1, 51–53.

Love in these words: *Love is the oldest, perfect in himself, and best counseled*").¹⁴ That he had accessed the prophetic frenzy was demonstrated by his writings, which, according to Ficino, contained divinely inspired anticipations of certain Christian truths such as the triune nature of God. Ficino knew that the religious sects of the ancient Mediterranean which identified themselves as "Orphic" (and which were connected with other mystery religions such as the cult of Dionysus) claimed Orpheus as their founder¹⁵—ample proof, for Ficino, that Orpheus had achieved the frenzy of the mysteries. Orpheus's famed musical ability had enabled him both to reach these heights of contemplation (in a poetic frenzy) and to share the divine wisdom he gained with others through his inspired song.

A long line of interpreters, including Horace¹⁶ and Dante,¹⁷ had explained the myth of Orpheus's ability to charm beasts and move trees and rivers with his music as an allegory for poetry's educational power, and in particular its capacity to elevate men from a bestial state into a civilized polity. It was Cristoforo Landino, Ficino's colleague and fellow admirer of Plato,¹⁸ who re-proposed this interpretation of the myth to the Platonically-minded intellectual elite of late Quattrocento Florence:

Dicono che col suono della sua cythera [Orfeo] ragunava a sé le fiere, et muoveva e monti, et fermava e fiumi. Il che non è altro se non che chon la

¹⁴ The passage is from Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, speech 1, chapter 3. The Latin text is from Laurens's edition (19) and the English is from Jayne's translation (37–38). Jayne has proposed that the word "laudaitque," which appears between *locuit* and *his* in the first printed edition but was removed in Marcel's edition and translation, should be allowed to stand.

¹⁵ See W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion* (New York: Norton, 1966).

¹⁶ See *Ars poetica* v. 391 ff.

¹⁷ "Quando dice Ovidio che Orfeo facea con la cetera mansuete le fiere, e li arbori e le pietre a sé muovere; che vuol dire come lo savio uomo con lo strumento de la sua voce faria mansuocere e umiliare li crudeli cuori, e faria muovere a la sua voluntade coloro che non hanno vita di scienza e d'arte: e coloro che non hanno vita ragionevole alcuna sono quasi come pietre" ("Thus Ovid says that with his lyre Orpheus tamed wild beasts and made trees and rocks move toward him, which is to say that the wise man with the instrument of his voice makes cruel hearts grow tender and humble and moves to his will those who do not devote their lives to knowledge and art; and those who have no rational life whatsoever are almost like stones") *Convivio* 2.1. The English translation is taken from Dante, *Convivio*, trans. Richard H. Lansing (New York: Garland, 1990).

¹⁸ For the role of Landino vis-à-vis Ficino in the establishment of a Platonizing cultural mode in fifteenth-century Florence, see Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought* (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1970), vol. 2, 712–721. On Landino, see also Roberto Cardini, *La critica del Landino* (Florence: Sansoni, 1993); idem, "Il Landino e la poesia," *Rassegna della letteratura italiana* 74 (1970): 273–297; Arthur Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 231–268.

sua eloquentia tirava alla vita civile gli huomini efferati, et commovea alla virtù gl'huomini stupidi et rozzi, et acquietava l'impeto de' furiosi.¹⁹

The power of Orpheus's song, according to Landino, symbolizes poetry's value as *paideia*, as a means of leading men toward virtue. Landino's promotion of this interpretation is an excellent measure of his position as a transitional figure linking the great tradition of Florentine civic humanism exemplified Coluccio Salutati and Leonardo Bruni with the contemplative and speculative elements that dominate Florentine intellectual culture in the later Quattrocento. Like Salutati and Bruni, Landino taught that a vital function of literature was to educate readers in the virtues of the civic life. Landino differed from these earlier Florentine humanists, however, in viewing civic virtue not as the highest lesson offered by poetic *paideia*, but as an intermediate stage of a larger process of growth.

Landino's work was deeply influenced by a Neoplatonic vision of human moral growth as a gradual ascent in which the individual develops progressively higher parts of his own soul, which in turn correspond to higher levels of the hierarchy of being. Thus a man dominated by his lower soul identifies himself merely with his body, and pursues only corporeal pleasures and the satisfaction of bodily appetites; this is the *vita voluptuosa*. With the passage of time this man may progress to the *vita activa*, in which he exercises primarily his rational soul and focuses on pursuing rational goods, civic morality, and political engagement. It is this transition that, in Landino's reading of the myth, Orpheus's singing catalyzes in his listeners.

In this transition to the *vita activa* the individual acquires the virtues—not, however, in their purest form. For the individual may progress beyond this stage to the *vita contemplativa*, focusing his attention on the activity of the intellectual soul—i.e. contemplation of the divine or intelligible realm.²⁰ At this stage the individual possesses a type of virtue higher than

¹⁹ Cristoforo Landino, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2001) vol. 1, 440. Landino is commenting on *Inferno* 4.139–141. "They say that with the sound of his cither [Orpheus] drew wild beasts to himself, and moved mountains, and halted rivers, which signifies that, through his eloquence, he introduced bestial men to civil life, and moved boorish and obtuse men to virtue, and restrained the violence of the frenzied." The English translation is my own.

²⁰ Ficino discusses the three grades of human life in the 1490 letter dedicating his *Philebus* commentary to Lorenzo de' Medici: "Tres esse vitas, nemo ratione vivens dubitat, contemplativam, activam, voluptuosam, quoniam videlicet tres ad felicitatem vias homines elegerunt: sapientiam, potentiam, voluptatem. Nos autem sub sapientiae nomine quodlibet liberalium artium studium religiosumque otium intelligimus. Sub appellatione potentiae auctoritatem in gubernatione civili pariter atque militari divitiarumque

the civic virtues—what Landino calls the “purifying virtues.” Desires arising from the body’s appetites can still tempt the person who has reached this stage, but Landino posits an even higher stage of morality in which the individual has settled permanently into the *vita contemplativa* and can no longer be tempted by desires; he now possesses what Landino calls the “virtues of the already purified soul”:

Divinus enim Plato, cum virtutes de vita et moribus easdem quas ceteri posuisset, ita ad postremum illas diversis sive ordinibus sive generibus distinguit, ut alia quadam ratione ab iis illas coli ostendat, qui coetus ac civitates adamant, alia ab iis, qui omnem mortalitatem dediscere cupientes et humanarum rerum odio moti ad sola divina cognoscenda eriguntur, alia postremo ab iis, qui ab omni iam contagione expiati in solis divinis versantur. Primas igitur civiles dixit, secundas purgatorias ac tertias animi iam purgati. Est enim triplex hominum recte et ex ratione viventium ordo. Horum trium inferior est eorum, qui in sociali ac civili vita degentes rerum publicarum administrationem suscipiunt. His proximi, sed tamen erectiori gradu constituti ii sunt, qui a publicis actionibus veluti tempestuosis ac procellosis et in quibus fortunae temeritas omnino dominetur se in portum tranquillitatis transferunt et a turba in otium se recipientes quietam vitam degunt, non ita tamen, ut non aliquid adhuc restet, adversus quod luctandum sit. Supremo autem loco eos cernes, qui penitus a rerum humanarum concursatione ac tumultu remoti nihil cuius paenitendum sit committunt.²¹

affluentiam et splendorem gloriae negotiosamque virtutem comprehendere putamus. Sub voluptatis denique cognomento quinque sensuum oblectamenta et laborum curarumque declinationem contineri non dubitamus. Primam igitur poetae Minervam, secundam vero Junonem, tertiam denique Venerem nominaverunt” (“No living being endowed with reason doubts there are three lives: the contemplative, the active, the pleasurable. This is because men elect three routes to happiness: wisdom, power, pleasure. However, we understand by the term ‘wisdom’ any application to the liberal arts, also religious peace. In using the term ‘power’ we think of having authority in civil government and likewise in the military, or having a lot of wealth or brilliant renown, or being actively engaged in doing things. Finally, and without a doubt, under the term ‘pleasure’ are contained the delights of the five senses and the avoidance of labours and worries. Accordingly, the poets named the first Minerva, the second Juno, and the third Venus”). Marsilio Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary*, ed. and trans. Michael J. B. Allen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 480–483. See also *ibid.*, 446–52.

²¹ Cristoforo Landino, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, ed. Peter Lohe (Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1980), 153–154. “For the divine Plato, although he had posited the same virtues concerning life and customs that others had, in the end distinguishes them by different orders or types, in such a way that he shows that the virtues are cultivated in a certain sense by those who love assemblies and cities, but in a different sense by those who, desiring to forget everything mortal, and, moved by aversion for human things, are excited to understand divine things only, and finally in another sense by those who, already purged of every negative influence, occupy themselves with divine matters only. Therefore Plato calls the first set of virtues ‘civil virtues,’ the second ‘purifying virtues,’ and the third ‘virtues of the already purified soul.’ For there is a three-fold order of men who live correctly

The core contribution of Cristoforo Landino to Florentine literary culture was his theory that the hierarchical ascent of these grades of morality is the fundamental allegorical structure underlying the greatest works of poetry—especially the *Aeneid* and the *Divine Comedy*.²² In developing this hermeneutical method Landino was heavily influenced by Latin Neoplatonists such as Macrobius; he relied only secondarily on Ficino's translations of Plato and the Greek Neoplatonic texts. Nevertheless, Landino's exegetical approach complemented and in a sense completed Ficino's own theory of poetry, and met with Ficino's explicit approval in the case of the *Divine Comedy*, as seen in the ecstatic praise for Landino in the letter Ficino penned for inclusion in Landino's 1480 edition of the *Divine Comedy* with his Platonizing commentary.²³

The hierarchical moral ascent of the Neoplatonists was such a dominant theme in Florentine philosophical and literary discourse by the middle of the 1470s that Angelo Poliziano chose to draw on it to endow his *Stanze* with an allegorical level of meaning, as various scholars, including Mario Martelli, have demonstrated.²⁴ To summarize this reading very briefly: the *Stanze* narrate Giuliano de' Medici's progress through the stages of life described above. At the beginning of the poem we find the protagonist Iulio in the *selva*—i.e., immersed in matter and limited to corporeal and sensual pursuits. A white deer captures Iulio's attention, shaking him out of his stasis by engaging his *appetitus*, which initially is merely sensual but soon transforms into something purer when the deer disappears and Iulio encounters the beautiful Simonetta. Simonetta is a real person—a body, not a Platonic form—, but his love for her enables him to discern the connection between corporeal beauty and intellectual beauty: “E 'n lei discerne un non se che divino” (“And in her he discerns something

and in accordance with reason. Of these three, the lowest type is that of the men who take up the administration of public matters, conducting the social and civil life. Near to these, but nevertheless ordered on a higher level, are those men who transfer themselves into the safe-haven of tranquility, moving away from public actions as from tempestuous and stormy situations in which the temerity of fortune completely dominates. These men, holding themselves back from the crowd in leisure, lead a quiet life—not so much so, however, that there does not remain something against which they must struggle. In the highest level, however, you will discern those men who, thoroughly remote from the disorder and tumult of human matters, commit no deeds for which they would need to repent.” The English translation is my own.

²² See Michael Murrin, *The Allegorical Epic: Essays in Its Rise and Decline* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 27–50.

²³ Landino, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, vol. 1, 268–70.

²⁴ Mario Martelli, “Le *Stanze per la giostra*: simbolo e struttura,” in *Angelo Poliziano: storia e metastoria* (Lecce: Conte Editore, 1995), 101–137.

divine").²⁵ Hence Iulio's love for Simonetta is rational love. This and other textual details demonstrate that Iulio has at this point arrived at the second stage of life, the *vita activa*, characterized by civic morality and political engagement. The long description of the *regno di Venere* offers a vision of the third stage of life, characterized by contemplation of and love for pure ideas. It should be noted that Ficino habitually interprets Venus as representing the intellectual realm, the angelic *Mens*. Since Poliziano did not complete the poem, one cannot be certain that the text would have gone on to allegorically narrate Iulio's progression to the *vita contemplativa*, but this certainly seems likely.

The fact that an allegory of moral progress of a Neoplatonic type underlies the *Stanze* does not mean that Poliziano was devoted wholeheartedly to Ficino's philosophy at the time when he wrote the text. It does, however, show that he possessed a fine understanding of Ficino's philosophy and Landino's influential approach to allegory, and recognized that these popular systems of thought offered him an excellent framework for carrying out his assigned task: that of immortalizing the victory of Giuliano de' Medici in the *giostra* of 1475.

This tournament had, after all, been organized by the Medici faction with the clear intent of publicly proclaiming Giuliano's entry into the world of politics alongside his brother Lorenzo, whose own political debut had been celebrated by a parallel tournament in 1469.²⁶ Poliziano recognized that Giuliano's coming-of-age corresponded, in the perspective of Ficino and Landino, to an entry into the *vita activa*. Particularly following Lorenzo de' Medici's much-publicized "conversion" to philosophy and apprenticeship to Ficino in 1473–74, Neoplatonic thought had become virtually the official cultural mode of the Medici party.²⁷ In these years it would have been almost unthinkable for an encomiastic work to issue from the pen of an "official" Medici poet without tapping into this

²⁵ *Stanze* 42.8. The English translation is taken from Angelo Poliziano, *The Stanze of Angelo Poliziano*, trans. David Quint (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

²⁶ Luigi Pulci was the Medicean poet given the task of commemorating Lorenzo's victory, which he did in his *ottava rima* poem *La Giostra*. See Paolo Orvieto's introduction to his edition of the text in Luigi Pulci, *Opere minori*, ed. Paolo Orvieto (Milan: Mursia editore, 1986), 55–60.

²⁷ See James Hankins, "Lorenzo de' Medici as a Student of Ficino: The *De Summo Bono*," in *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2004), vol. 2, 317–350.

hugely influential philosophical current in some way; Poliziano succeeded in doing so with consummate literary skill.

The influence of Ficino's *De amore* on the *Stanze* can be easily recognized from the role that *eros* plays in the text: increasingly sublimated forms of love are the force that lures Iulio to improve himself morally and spiritually. The text does not, however, thematize the phenomenon of divine frenzy as Ficino defined it—i.e. as a brief surge of altered, contemplative experience. This may be due to the unfinished state of the text. After all, while Ficino, in the *De amore* and elsewhere, identifies love as the force leading the soul through every phase of its upward movement, the *frenzy* of love occurs only in the final phase, at the very summit of the soul's ascent. Hence its logical place in a narrative poem based on Neoplatonic allegory would be at the conclusion, which in the case of the *Stanze* was never written. In any case, the text as it stands narrates Iulio's journey towards the contemplative life, not into the rarefied upper reaches of contemplative ecstasy, the subject of Ficino's theory of divine frenzy. The latter phenomenon of frenzy *will*, however, be a central theme of Poliziano's *Fabula di Orfeo*.

These two phases or types of ascent are both themes very dear to Ficino and Landino, but are to be distinguished from one another, and are described in qualitatively different terms, particularly as regards their duration. The first type, the main focus of Landino's exegesis, is a long and gradual process of moral improvement culminating in the definitive attainment of the *vita contemplativa*: the arduous journey of spiritual growth that Landino saw allegorized in the story of Aeneas's wanderings and travails. The second type of ascent, described and further subdivided by Ficino's theory of divine frenzy, is the sudden rapture that lifts the contemplative mind to make temporary contact with the highest levels of the ontological hierarchy. While the hard-won moral ascent to the *vita contemplativa* is, ideally, irreversible, the ascent brought about by divine frenzy is inherently fleeting. Kristeller notes that the juxtaposition of these two types of ascent within Ficino's writings can prove an obstacle to the proper interpretation of Ficino's thought:

The mind can therefore achieve the highest act of contemplation under certain conditions, but it is hindered from remaining in that state by the needs of the body and of external life. Hence, after a brief moment of absolute perfection it must return to the sphere of common experience or at least to the lesser degrees of contemplation. The formula for steady ascent presented at the beginning is therefore abandoned, and the course of contemplation appears as a restless upward and downward motion; for scarcely has the

Soul arrived at its goal, when it is again at once separated from it, to tend toward it soon again in a renewed effort.

If we keep these facts in mind, the apparent contradiction between Ficino's various statements disappears. In one place he says that the Soul reaches the state of perfect contemplation only for a moment; but at other times we read that the mind, once awakened to contemplation, will never abandon it again unless temporarily distracted by the care of the body. Ficino evidently has in mind at one time only the act of intuition of God, at another the whole course of internal experience, including the lower and higher degrees of contemplation. The Soul therefore achieves the highest act of contemplation only for a fleeting moment, but once elevated to the sphere of contemplation, it never again departs from it, barring external obstacles.²⁸

The contemplative understanding achieved in a divine frenzy is indeed so fleeting, Ficino writes (following Plato), that a poet who has uttered inspired verses will have no way of understanding the deep truths concealed in his own poetry once the frenzy subsides: "[Plato censet] eosque poetas qui celesti inspiratione ac vi rapiuntur adeo divinos sepenumero Musis afflatos sensus expromere, ut ipsimet postmodum extra furorem positi que protulerint minus intelligant" ("[Plato] thinks that those poets who are possessed by divine inspiration and power often utter such supreme words when inspired by the Muses, that afterwards, when the rapture has left them, they themselves scarcely understand what they have uttered").²⁹

In the overall context of Plato's theory of poetry this point (which Ficino found in the *Ion*) is part of Plato's argument that poetry, for all its aesthetic value, is not anchored in the stable understanding of truth (and morality) that can be achieved through reason. Plato therefore concludes that poetry can become a dangerous force of moral corruption. As is well known, it is this concern that leads Plato to banish poets from his ideal republic.³⁰

Ficino and Landino, despite the depth of their admiration for Plato, could not or would not accept their master's conclusion on this point. To be sure, Landino enthusiastically embraced the Platonic concept of

²⁸ Kristeller, *Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, 225–226.

²⁹ Ficino is referring here to Plato's *Ion*, 534. The quotation is from Ficino's letter *De divino furore*. The Latin text is from Marsilio Ficino, *Lettere I*, ed. Sebastiano Gentile (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1990), 25. The English translation is from *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino, Translated from the Latin by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, London* (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1975), 18.

³⁰ See Plato's *Republic*, books 3 and 10.

poetic frenzy that Ficino had recovered. He utilized it for ends decidedly contrary to those of Plato, however: as a justification for his firm personal conviction that inspired poetry, interpreted in light of philosophy, could lead its readers in a process of moral growth corresponding to a stable ascent to the *vita contemplativa*.

To what extent did contemporary Florentines recognize that the exalted view of poetry's origin and powers promoted by Ficino and Landino contradicted Plato's own writings on the question of the moral value of inspired poetry?³¹ None of Ficino's associates directly accused Ficino of misrepresenting Plato's views about poetry. However, Ficino's fondness for using Orpheus as an emblematic figure for the value of the four divine frenzies did in the end make him the target of a well-known polemic. For Plato's writings contain a number of negative remarks about Orpheus and the Orphic sect. Particularly problematic, for Ficino, was *Symposium* 179 C–D, where Plato describes Orpheus as a coward who had been unable to recover his beloved Eurydice because of his own fear of death.³² Giovanni Pico, Ficino's friend and also one of his most capable critics, recognized that Ficino had deliberately avoided discussing Plato's negative assessment of Orpheus, and did not hesitate to take him to task. In his *Commento* on Girolamo Benivieni's *Canzona de amore*, Pico insists that, interpreted properly in Platonic terms, the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice shows that the human soul cannot achieve the true, definitive vision of the Intelligible realm (i.e. God) before death:

È adunque l'intenzione di Platone di dimostrare come per alcuna via non sia da sperare di potere aggiugnere alla fruizione della intellettuale bellezza, se prima in tutto le inferiore potenzie abbandonando, la umana vita insieme con quelle non si abbandona; nè ama perfettamente; cioè d'amore perfetto, chi per amore non muore...e questo nè più leggiadramente nè

³¹ On Ficino's efforts to come to terms with Plato's banishment of the narrative poets from his ideal republic, see Michael J. B. Allen, "Poets Outside the City," in *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1998), 93–123.

³² "Thus heaven itself has a peculiar regard for ardor and resolution in the cause of Love. And yet the gods sent Orpheus away from Hades empty-handed, and showed him the mere shadow of the woman he had come to seek. Eurydice herself they would not let him take, because he seemed, like the mere minstrel that he was, to be a lukewarm lover, lacking the courage to die as Alcestis died for love, and choosing rather to scheme his way, living, into Hades. And it was for this that the gods doomed him, and doomed him justly, to meet his death at the hands of women." *Symposium* 179 C–D, trans. Michael Joyce, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1961), 533–534.

più sottilmente potea dichiarare Platone che per lo esemplo da lui addutto d'Orfeo, del quale dice che, desiderando andare a vedere l'amata Euridice, non volse andargli per morte, come molle e effeminato dalla musica sua, ma cercò modo di andargli vivo, e perciò dice Platone che non potè conseguire la vera Euridice, ma solo un'ombra e uno fantasma di lei gli fu dimostrato . . . Il quale senso benchè sia sottile e alto, nondimeno è alle cose tanto conforme che quasi maraviglia mi pare che e Marsilio e ogni altro, preso dalle parole di Platone, non l'abbia inteso.³³

Ficino would not have objected to the conclusion that the soul can reach the definitive, permanent enjoyment of the divine only after death. He relied so heavily on the Platonic theory of frenzy, however, precisely because he saw it as confirming his conviction that the human soul can gain a valid, if temporary, glimpse of the transcendent while still living in the body.³⁴ Moreover, he saw the career of Orpheus as emblematic of the poetic frenzy's power to preserve these fleeting glimpses of the divine in the form of enduring poetry that could be written down, transmitted, and interpreted for the edification of other people. Plato's negative remarks about Orpheus in the *Symposium* could hardly be reconciled with this reading. In his *De amore* Ficino had, indeed, shown a definite reluctance to interpret allegorically the negative ending of the Orpheus and Eurydice

³³ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De Ente et Uno, e scritti vari*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Florence: Vallecchi Editore, 1942), 555–556. "Plato's intention is to show that there is no hope of being able to achieve the enjoyment of intellectual beauty in any way except by completely giving up one's own lower faculties, and with them human life itself. No one can love perfectly, that is, with perfect love, without dying for that love . . . Plato could not have explained this principle more gracefully or subtly than he does in citing the example of Orpheus. Plato says that although Orpheus wanted to go to see his beloved Euridice, he was not willing to go to her through death, because he had been made soft and weak by his own music. Instead he tried to find a way of going to her alive, and therefore, Plato says, Orpheus was not able to reach the true Euridice, but was shown only a ghost or apparition of her . . . Although this meaning is subtle and profound, it is nevertheless so consistent with the facts that it seems to me almost a wonder that neither Marsilio nor anyone else has understood it on the basis of Plato's text." The English translation is taken from Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Commentary on a Canzone of Benivieni*, trans. Sears Jayne (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1984), 148–149.

³⁴ Edgar Wind has noted that, in contrast with the more severe Pico, "Ficino sustained the gentler view that union with the ultimate need not always entail extinction. 'It is possible,' he wrote in his commentary on Plotinus, 'to achieve this not only after the present life but also while we are living (*etiam in hac vita*).' And Plotinus himself seemed to supply the proof. He had experienced these extreme states occasionally, and without detriment to his sober vision, and he did not hesitate to speak of them as reflected or copied in more familiar states of love. . . ." *Pagan mysteries in the Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), 68.

story, no doubt because he saw that it could raise problematic implications for his cherished theory of poetic frenzy:

Sed hanc rationem copiosissime explicat Phedrus et exempla ponit amorum tria. Unum amoris femine ad masculum, ubi de Alceste Admeti uxore loquitur, que pro marito mori uoluit. Alterum amoris masculi ad feminam, ut Orphei ad Eurydicem. Tertium amoris masculi ad masculum, ut Patrocli ad Achillem. Ubi ostendit nihil fortiores homines reddere quam amorem. Allegoriam uero uel Alcestis uel Orphei in presentia perscrutari non est consilium. Vehementius enim ista uim amoris et imperium exprimunt, si tamquam historia gesta narrentur, quam si per allegoriam dicta putentur.³⁵

Here Ficino is not only abstaining (rather clumsily) from providing his own personal allegorical interpretation of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth. He is also refusing to report to his readers the interpretation that Plato gives of the myth in the *Symposium*—a suspicious choice indeed, given that Ficino's text is a commentary ostensibly designed to elucidate the meaning of the *Symposium*.

Ficino's discomfort about the conclusions that might be reached by those applying an allegorical reading to the story of Orpheus's failure is thus quite evident to any reader of the *De amore*, and was probably widely recognized among Ficino's own circle. While Pico, writing the *Commento* in 1486, credited himself with being the first to unveil the proper Platonic allegorical interpretation of Orpheus's failure, he was certainly not the first member of Ficino's circle to refocus the attention of Italy's *litterati* on the ugly, tragic side of the Orpheus myth. It was, rather, Poliziano who, several years earlier, had made Orpheus's failure and violent death the subject of his innovative secular tragedy. In the following pages, I will argue that Poliziano, like Pico, was drawn to Orpheus because his story, so closely identified with Ficino, held within it—in its tragic ending—an elegant means of calling Ficino's theoretical framework into question. In particular, the *Fabula di Orfeo* undercuts Ficino's fantasy that his own

³⁵ "But Phaedrus explains this principle at length and gives three examples of loves. One is the love of a woman for a man, where he speaks about Alcestis, the wife of Admetus, who was willing to die for her husband. Another of the love of a man for a woman, as of Orpheus for Euridice. Third of the love of a man for a man, as of Patroclus for Achilles. Where he shows that nothing renders men braver than love. But it is not my intention for the present to examine the allegory either of Alcestis or of Orpheus. For these stories illustrate the power and dominion of love more forcefully if they are told as history than if they are thought to have been meant allegorically." The passage is in speech 1, chapter 4. The Latin text is from Laurens's edition (19) and the English is from Jayne's translation (42).

revival of Platonic frenzy could serve to account for and guarantee the moral and even religious value of poetry.

Again, credit is due to Mario Martelli for drawing attention to the fact that Poliziano's *Orfeo*, like the *Stanze*, presents elements of Neoplatonic moral allegory. Martelli has argued that the utter lack of psychological verisimilitude that characterizes the actions of Orpheus at the conclusion of the play encourages the reader to seek out an allegorical meaning for these actions.³⁶ Within moments of losing his beloved, faithful wife for the second time, Orpheus begins giving voice to a fiercely misogynistic attitude, declaring that he will shun women and dedicate himself instead to pederasty, and exhorting his fellow men to break their own marriage bonds.

In terms of the ethical and psychological hierarchy of Ficino, Poliziano's Orpheus has rapidly descended to the lowest type of human life, the life of the senses or *vita voluptuosa*. His desire for young boys is clearly a demeaning reversal of the elevating love that he had for Eurydice; by seeking to persuade other men to violate their marital vows he is attacking the civic and moral virtues that characterize the *vita activa*.

Martelli hypothesizes that Poliziano chose the story of Orpheus because, juxtaposed with the *Stanze*, it would form a sort of diptych. While the *Stanze* show the individual's successful ascent from the life of the senses to the *vita activa*, and onward toward the *vita contemplativa*, the *Orfeo* is supposed to illustrate how the journey of ethical and psychological progress can go awry if the individual fails to definitively renounce merely sensual pleasures: "This is a teaching that is easy to decipher: those who do not subordinate the active life to the contemplative life, directing the former to the latter, cannot sustain that level of life that is positive in and of itself, and plummet to the lowest degree of the sensual and voluptuous life."³⁷

It is possible, however, to arrive at a more complete understanding of the tragedy's connections to Ficino's philosophical project by identifying references not only to the Neoplatonic journey of ethical progress, but also to the theory of divine frenzy that Ficino specifically associated with Orpheus. As Giuseppe Mazzotta has demonstrated, the *Orfeo* is permeated

³⁶ Mario Martelli, "La *Fabula d'Orfeo*," in *Angelo Poliziano: storia e metastoria* (Lecce: Conte Editore, 1995), 74–101. For the scholarly background of Martelli's interpretation, see also Paolo Orvieto, "Boccaccio mediatore di generi o dell'allegoria d'amore," *Interpres* 2 (1979): 7–104.

³⁷ Mario Martelli, "La *Fabula d'Orfeo*," 96.

with references to the theme of frenzy.³⁸ In particular, Poliziano's description of Orpheus's journey to the underworld casts it as an experience of Ficinian *furor*. In light of this crucial insight, the shockingly immoral pronouncements that Orpheus issues after his return to earth must be understood as the misguided teachings of a would-be poet-prophet who has glimpsed divine truth in a frenzy but quickly lost sight of it. The fragility of Ficino's theory of poetry, which makes the moral value of poetry depend on the divine insights which a poet can supposedly glimpse in fleeting moments of frenzy, is thus highlighted in Poliziano's tragedy.

The *Orfeo's* initial scene, centered on Aristeo, illustrates the ambiguity inherent in the frenzies, states of divine madness which are perilously difficult to distinguish from mere insanity. Ficino himself, while a tireless exponent of the value of contemplative ascent through frenzy, warned that seductive and false simulacra of these frenzies could lead the soul into a dangerous descent:

Plato noster . . . furorem in *Phaedro* mentis alienationem definit. Alienationis autem duo genera tradit, unam ab humanis morbis, alteram a deo provenientem: insaniam illam, hanc divinum furorem nuncupat. Insania infra hominis speciem homo deiicitur et ex homine brutum quodammodo redditur; divino furore supra hominis naturam erigitur et in deum transit.³⁹

The opening sequence of Poliziano's text signals to the reader that Aristeo, burning with love for Eurydice, is in the grip not of divine frenzy but of *insania*: Aristeo himself admits that, when he glimpsed Eurydice, "mia mente d'amor divenne insana" ("my mind so with love was torn").⁴⁰ As Mazzotta has shown, the word *mente* that Poliziano uses here has a precise meaning, showing the reader that it is Aristeo's intellect (the faculty of the soul, superior to reason, that connects it with the angelic *Mens*) which

³⁸ Giuseppe Mazzotta, "Poliziano's *Orfeo*: The World as Fable," in *Cosmopoiesis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 5–23.

³⁹ "...in the *Phaedrus* our Plato defines frenzy as an alienation of the mind. But he gives us two kinds of alienation, one coming from human diseases, the other from God. He calls the former insanity but the latter a divine frenzy. Insanity casts a man down from the human species, and from being a man he is made in a way into a beast, while divine frenzy raises him above man's nature and he passes over to God." The text is Ficino's introduction to his translation of Plato's *Ion*. Ficino, *Commentaries on Plato, Phaedrus and Ion*, vol. 1, 195.

⁴⁰ *Fabula di Orfeo*, v. 15. Here and subsequently I quote from Angelo Poliziano, *Poesie*, ed. Francesco Bausi (Turin: UTET, 2006). The English translation is from *A Translation of the Orpheus of Angelo Politian and the Aminta of Torquato Tasso*, trans. Louis E. Lord (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931).

has fallen ill.⁴¹ He has therefore lost the very faculty that makes contemplative ascent possible. Nevertheless, he persists in the vain belief that he is experiencing a spiritually elevating love frenzy, as is demonstrated by his prayer to Love, in which he asks to borrow the god's wings: "Porgimi, Amor, porgimi or le tue ale!" ("Give, O Love, give me thy wings!")⁴²

Aristeo's lofty hopes are sadly misguided. He is not experiencing divine frenzy, but mere lust, and by abandoning himself to this passion he brings about Eurydice's tragic death. Aristeo and his friends also demonstrate their inability to distinguish between genuine poetic frenzy and its false simulacrum, profane music. Aristeo directs his song to the forests, as though he believes that, like Orpheus, he too might move trees with his voice. His servant Tirsi, describing Eurydice, reports the beauty of her song: "e parla e canta in sì dolce favella, / che i fiumi isvolgerebbe inverso il fonte" ("she speaks and sings with such sweet accents that she could turn the rivers back towards their fonts").⁴³ Yet Tirsi is mistaken as well: it is not Eurydice but her husband Orpheus who has the power to reverse the course of rivers with his inspired song.

Orpheus, in contrast to Aristeo, is able to tap into the genuine forms of divine frenzy. Once he has arrived in the underworld, Orpheus affirms that he was able to make the journey because he had been able to fly with the wings of Love: "Qua giù m'ha scorto solamente Amore, / volato son qua giù colle sue ali" ("Love alone hath brought me here below. Thither have I flown on his wings").⁴⁴ The reader easily recognizes in these lines an echo of Aristeo's earlier request to be granted the wings of Love. Orpheus, unlike Aristeo, succeeds in using these wings to fly—that is, he experiences a genuine frenzy of love. In this way he is able, provisionally, to reunite with Eurydice.

We have seen in the quotation from the "Coronide" to the *Miscellanea*, above, that Poliziano was familiar with the traditional allegorical reading (probably invented by Fulgentius)⁴⁵ that interpreted Eurydice etymologically as "broad judgment"—or, perhaps more precisely, the profound wisdom that is the goal of philosophy. In his tragic drama Poliziano relies on his audience's familiarity with this traditional allegory. It is this Eurydice—contemplative wisdom—that Orpheus is able to recover

⁴¹ See Mazzotta, "Poliziano's *Orfeo*," 17.

⁴² *Fabula di Orfeo*, v. 140.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, v. 108.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, vv. 167–68.

⁴⁵ See John Block Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 89.

provisionally through divine frenzy. Yet precisely because Platonic frenzy is an inherently temporary phenomenon, Orpheus's intention to recover Eurydice permanently was doomed to fail from the start. His gesture of turning back to look at her face is merely the physical embodiment of his own—inevitable—return to a state of normal consciousness involving attention to the physical body. As his divine frenzy fades, Orpheus and Eurydice are again separated, and their words denounce the operation of *furore*. Eurydice cries: "Ecco ch'i' ti son tolta a gran *furore*, / né sono ormai più tua. / Ben tendo a te le braccia, ma non vale, / ché 'ndrieto son tirata. Orfeo mie, vale!" ("See how I am torn from thee with violence. No longer am I thine. I stretch to thee my arms, but it avails not. Backward am I hurled. My Orpheus, farewell"). And Orpheus responds: "Oimè, se' mi tu tolta, / Euridice mie bella? O mie *furore*" ("Alas, hast thou been taken from, Euridice, my beautiful? O madness mine!")⁴⁶

Ficino's Orphic theory of poetry held that the divine frenzies could enable the poet to achieve great ends: his brief contact with the divine could lead to his own lasting moral improvement and allow him to educate others in morality and in the mysteries of religion. The behaviour of Poliziano's Orpheus after his return from the underworld—i.e., after the cessation of his divine frenzy—counters these notions one by one.

Orpheus's speech first reveals that his own moral progress has been reversed, not advanced, in the wake of his experience of frenzy. This is, in Poliziano's text, the meaning of Orpheus's sudden invention of ped-arasty: he has lost sight of the elevating celestial *eros* that he had briefly experienced in his frenzy, and now dedicates himself to a demeaning variety of merely sensual *eros*. To drive the point home, Poliziano makes his Orpheus utter the exact same misogynistic verses that Iulio had spoken at the opening of the *Stanze*:

Quanto è misero l'uom che cangia voglia
per donna, o mai per lei s'allegra o dole,
o qual per lei di libertà si spoglia
o crede a suo' sembianti o sue parole!
Che sempre è più legger ch'al vento foglia
mille volte il di vuole e disvuole:
segue chi fugge, a chi la vuol s'asconde
e vanne e vien come alla riva l'onde.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Fabula di Orfeo*, vv. 247–252.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, vv. 277–284. "How wretched the man who changes his purpose for a woman, or ever for her is happy or sad! Or who barter for her his liberty, or who puts faith in her pretences or her words. She is ever lighter than a leaf before the wind. A thousand times

Thus Poliziano ensured that the informed elite among his audience—those who had read his *Stanze* and understood the Neoplatonic allegory underlying that text—would not fail to recognize that Orpheus had plunged to the lowest stage of morality, the stage that the young Iulio occupied before his journey of spiritual progress began.

Moreover, Poliziano's Orpheus assumes the authority to instruct his fellow men about morality—a crucial function of the inspired poet in Ficino's conception. Orpheus's moral teaching, however, is clearly guiding his listeners toward precisely the same regression that he himself has undergone. This emerges unmistakably from the last two verses that Orpheus speaks in the play: "Conforto e maritati a far divorzio, / e ciascun fugga il femminil consorzio" ("The married man I urge to seek divorce, and all to flee the company of women"). Since the institution of marriage has been traditionally cited as the most fundamental bond uniting men and women into societal structures,⁴⁸ Orpheus's attack on marriage threatens to lower his individual listeners, and society as a whole, from the rational civic virtue of the *vita activa* to the mere hedonism of the *vita voluptuosa*.

With the arrival of the Bacchantes the tone of the play abruptly changes, climaxing in a troubling mixture of ritualistic violence and humor. Poliziano seems to take his stand here against a particularly problematic facet of Ficino's Orphic vision of poetry. Ficino believed that Orpheus had

a day she will and will not. She follows him who flees. From him who wishes her she hides, and like the wave upon the shore she comes and goes." The verse is an exact echo of the fourteenth octave of the *Stanze*, except that in that text the initial verse reads "Ah, quanto è uom meschin, che cangia voglia" ("Ah, how miserable is the man who changes his mind"). Angelo Poliziano, *Poesie*, 123. Since it has not been possible to determine with certainty the dates of composition of either Poliziano's *Stanze* or his *Orfeo*, it is technically possible that the *ottava* was originally composed for the *Orfeo* and re-utilized for the *Stanze*. This seems far less likely, however, for a number of reasons, including the fact that, while the *ottava* fits well into its context within the *Stanze*, it appears to have been inserted into the *Orfeo* itself as a kind of afterthought, creating a slight disruption in the logical flow of ideas within Orpheus's monologue. Before the *ottava* was inserted, verses 285–287 ("Fanne di questo Giove intera fede, / che dal dolce amoroso nodo avinto / si gode in cielo il suo bel Ganimede") ["Of this is Jove assured who scorns the sweet amorous tie that binds him and in heaven enjoys his beautiful Ganymede"]) would have followed fairly closely after the praise of pederasty that occupies vv. 269–272. Instead, with this *ottava* having been introduced, Giove seems to be bearing witness to the inconstancy of women. In her critical edition Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti draws attention to this issue, but stops short of concluding that it represents decisive evidence that the *Stanze* were composed before the *Orfeo*. See Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti, *L'Orfeo del Poliziano con il testo critico dell'originale e delle successive forme teatrali* (Rome: Editrice Antenore, 2000), 68–70.

⁴⁸ See, for instance, Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 5.1011 ff. In the *Nutricia* (vv. 53–55, 106–8) Poliziano will transparently echo this passage from Lucretius in claiming that the institution of marriage was a pivotal step in the development of human society.

composed the *Orphic Hymns* for use in theurgical rites to be performed by the initiates of the mystery religion he founded. Orpheus, according to Ficino, succeeded in transmitting through poetry the sacred truths he gained through the frenzy of the mysteries—the frenzy which Plato had identified with Bacchus. Unlike Ficino, Poliziano was not inclined to think that poetic inspiration could or should be used to create efficacious religious rites. The verse invocation to Bacchus that Poliziano puts in the mouths of the Bacchantes lampoons the mystery religions themselves and the role of poetry in these rites. A far cry from the echoes of divine harmony that Ficino claimed to detect in inspired poems such as the *Orphic Hymns*, the Bacchantes' hymn features obscene double-entendres, a jarring staccato rhythm, and colloquial—even simply corrupt—vocabulary. The song reveals, moreover, that the frenzy which possesses these worshippers is nothing but mere inebriation.

In an explosion of sacrificial violence the Bacchantes enact the punishment that Orpheus has earned for undermining civic morality. In this Poliziano follows Ovid rather directly. It is with the drunken song that concludes the play, however, that Poliziano drives home the critical message that attracted him to the myth. For the wild, self-mocking “dithyramb” that the Bacchantes intone in their frenzy (or rather, drunkenness) calls into question the very possibility of a meaningful union between religious mysteries and poetry—the union which Ficino celebrated as the essence of Orphism.

In the *Orfeo*, Poliziano registers his skepticism about Ficino's interpretation of poetic frenzy as a channel for unmediated communication with a divine force—and particularly about the claim that this mechanism could endow poetry with the ability to guide men to moral growth. Poliziano's work subsequent to the *Orfeo* no longer makes use of the Neoplatonic hierarchy of morality that he had adopted for his *Stanze*. Evidently he no longer felt obliged, as a *litteratus* of the Medici party, to promote these themes—understandably, given that relations between Lorenzo de' Medici and Marsilio Ficino were strained in the years immediately following the Pazzi conspiracy. Yet Poliziano does continue to devote his attention to the theory of poetic frenzy, showing that the idea held an intrinsic interest for him, even though he did not share Ficino's interpretation of the Platonic theory. Poliziano's writings permit us to chart his efforts, particularly evident in the period between 1480 and 1485, to elaborate his own independent theory of poetic frenzy as an alternative to Ficino's influential interpretation.

When Poliziano returned to Florence after the brief self-imposed exile between 1479 and 1480 caused by tensions between himself and Lorenzo de' Medici, he began his new career as professor at the Florentine Studio with a lecture course on the *Istitutiones oratoriae* of Quintilian and the *Silvae* of Statius. His choice of authors generated considerable controversy: critics objected that he had been hired to teach oratory and poetry, two genres of Latin literature that certain purists regarded as all but synonymous with the writings of Cicero and Virgil, respectively. Poliziano subverted institutional expectations by choosing to lecture on Statius's *Silvae* instead of one of Virgil's poetic works. Certainly in part the gesture was meant precisely to combat the purism of his humanist colleagues who saw any deviation from the golden Latin of Cicero and Virgil as decay. But why did he choose Statius's *Silvae* specifically? The special merit of the *Silvae*, according to Poliziano's commentary on the work, was that the author had composed them spontaneously, in a state that Poliziano identifies as a frenzy. In his introduction, Statius writes that the *Silvae* "... mihi subito calore et quadam festinandi voluptate fluxerunt..." ("flowed from me with a sudden zeal and a certain pleasure in haste"). Poliziano glosses the passage thus:

SUBITO CALORE. Quasi χαρακτηρισμος silvae est. Nam, ut dictum a Fabio est, qui sylvam componunt calorem atque impetum sequentes ex tempore scribunt. CALORE. Ergo omnino videtur hic poeta concitioris ingenii fervidiorisque fuisse et quod impetus magis ac celeritate polleret, quam robore et viribus; quapropter in his libellis vivit illa incitatio et eminet. Natura enim operi impar non erat fervorque ille animi ad finem usque perseverabat. Quales enim sensus haberet, tales quoque hos libellos componebat, qui nimirum vel granditate heroica, vel sensibus, vel ipsa gratia etiam Thebaida elimatissimum opus longe antecellunt, quod in illa a natura destitutus, quippe quae ultra primos impetus deferbuerat, artis praesidium necessario exigebat. Verum nulla tanta ars est, quae afflationem illam mentis, quam ενθουσιασμον Graeci dicunt, imitari possit, unde existit Platonis illa atque ante ipsum Democriti opinio: 'poetam bonum neminem sine inflammatione animorum existere posse et sine quodam afflatu quasi furoris.'⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Angelo Poliziano, *Commento inedito alle Selve di Stazio*, ed Lucia Cesarini Martinelli (Florence: Sansoni, 1978), 29. "SUDDEN ZEAL: This is, as it were, a characteristic of the *silva*. For, as Quintilian said, those who compose *silvae* write extemporaneously, following heat and impetus. ZEAL: Therefore this poet seems indeed to have been of a rather passionate and fiery disposition, the sort which excels in impetus and in rapidity, rather than in strength and force; for this reason that ardor is alive in this book and stands out. For his innate talent was equal to the task, and that passion of spirit persevered all the way to its goal. For he was writing a book of a sort that matched the feelings he had, a book which undoubtedly far outdoes even his own *Thebaid* (an extremely polished work) in its heroic

According to Poliziano, Statius's *Silvae* are superior to his *Thebaid* because the latter work is primarily the product of artifice, while the former is the product of frenzy. Poliziano thus employs here the same dichotomy (poetic artifice vs. poetic frenzy) that had been popularized in Florence by Ficino. It is important to note, however, that Poliziano uses this dichotomy to compare two works by the same, highly learned poet. The learned Statius achieved better results, Poliziano says, when he composed rapidly in a frenzy than when he relied on his controlled erudition alone.⁵⁰

Poliziano's most significant departure from Ficino in this passage is to conspicuously leave out precisely that aspect of the theory of poetic frenzy that was most dear to Ficino: namely, the divine origin of the poetic frenzy. The frenzy that Statius is able to channel in writing the *Silvae* originates in his own nature, his "rather fiery disposition." Poliziano writes that Statius was forced to rely on skill alone in writing the *Thebaid* not because a supernatural force had ceased to inspire him, but because his *natura* had cooled off. Poliziano suggests that the channeling of poetic frenzy is preferable to the controlled application of artifice only because (at least in the case of Statius) it produces poetry that is superior in aesthetic terms. He does not claim that poetic frenzy should be valued as a potential gateway to divine truths.

The fact that Poliziano remained committed to exploring the theme of poetic frenzy even after he had largely distanced himself from Ficino's Platonism probably has to do with the fact that Poliziano possessed a remarkable ability for improvising poetry.⁵¹ He seems to have initially developed this ability, and gained distinction for it, in the years when the carefree *brigata* surrounding the young Lorenzo de' Medici used to entertain themselves by spontaneously composing and performing poems.

grandeur, in its feelings, and in its very grace. For in the *Thebaid*, deserted by his innate talent, which obviously had cooled off after his first vigorous charges, he was forced to rely on the help of art. But there is no skill which can imitate that inspiration of the mind which the Greeks call *ενθουσιασμος*, which is the reason for the opinion of Plato, and Democritus before him, that 'no one can become a good poet without a kindling of the spirit and without, as it were, a certain infusion of frenzy.'" The English translation is my own.

⁵⁰ For an important study of the aesthetic ideals that Poliziano developed through his studies of Statius, see Attilio Bettinzoli, "Le 'Silvae': questioni di poetica," in *Daedaleum iter: studi sulla poesia e la poetica di Angelo Poliziano* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1995), 67–151.

⁵¹ On Poliziano's abilities as an improviser of poetry, see Daniela Delcorno Branca, "Da Poliziano a Serafino," in *Miscellanea di studi in onore di Vittore Branca* (Florence: Olschki, 1983), vol. 3, 423–450; Paolo Orvieto, "Angelo Poliziano 'compare' della brigata laurenziana," *Lettere italiane* 25 (1973): 301–318; Isidoro Del Lungo, *Florentia: Uomini e cose del Quattrocento* (Florence: G. Barbera Editore, 1897), 310–311.

Among this company (whose poetic tastes were dominated by the genius of Luigi Pulci), Poliziano acquired the nickname “il compare”, which perhaps referred to his talent as an accompanist able to enhance the improvised poetic performances of the group by playing along on the viola.

Although the poetic culture of the Laurentian *brigata* was soon eclipsed by the increasing dominance of Ficino’s philosophy, the experience had a lasting influence on Poliziano’s career as poet and scholar. Poliziano continued to hone his abilities as an improviser in his maturity, and in fact acquired the ability to compose extemporaneously in Latin and even in ancient Greek—a clear sign that he did not view poetic improvisation as a frivolous pursuit unrelated to his philological studies.⁵² His scholarly work on Statius must therefore be understood in the context of this ongoing interest: he studied Statius’s *Silvae* in part to gain a better understanding of how the ancients had themselves practiced and valued spontaneity in poetic composition.

The introductory oration that Poliziano prepared for his course on Statius and Quintilian offers further evidence that Poliziano valued the *Silvae* particularly as examples of improvisatory composition:

Itaque dum se ‘diu multumque dubitasse’ ait, an eos libellos de integro collectos emitteret, facile ad id viam sternit quo sibi perveniendum destinaverat, ut tumultuaria scilicet esse illos ‘subitoque calore’ effusos persuaderet. Quamlibet enim multis neque fucosis ornamentis abundarent, minime tamen homini de omni sua existimatione sollicito vel haec ipsa celeritatis commendatio fuerat negligenda, quippe cui et indulgentia liberior et venia proclivior et admiratio maior deberetur... saepe evenit, sive id morositate quadam ingenii, sive iudicii nimia severitate, atque adeo tristissima censura, ut nihil interim absolutum putemus nisi in quo vehementissime laboratum sit. Contra vero saepe usu venit ut scripta nostra nimia cura vel peiora fiant, neque tam lima poliantur quam exterantur.⁵³

⁵² See Del Lungo, *Florentia*, 311.

⁵³ The passage, from Poliziano’s *Oratio super Fabio Quintiliano et Statii Sylvis*, is published in *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1952), 874–875. “And so when he says that he was in great doubt for a long time whether he should publish a complete collection of those poems, he is laying out an easy path to the goal which he had made up his mind to reach—namely, that of persuading others that those poems flowed from him extemporaneously and with a ‘sudden zeal.’ For even though those poems were overflowing with numerous genuine artistic touches, nevertheless a man caring greatly about his reputation could hardly overlook the fact that respect for his ability to compose rapidly would likely win him freer indulgence from his readers, readier favor, and greater admiration... It often happens—whether because of innate pedantry, or excessive severity of judgment, or obsessive self-criticism—, that we think that no work is complete unless we have labored over it extremely. Yet in practice

The passage clarifies the reasons why Poliziano values the cultivation of a poetic spontaneity like that exemplified by Statius in the *Silvae*. On the one hand, he suggests that poetry composed extemporaneously possesses aesthetic virtues that can subsequently be marred if the poet cannot restrain himself from endlessly revising his work. On the other hand, the difficulty of extemporaneous composition is so great (and so evident) that a reputation for an ability to improvise verse can win respect and fame for a poet, even if the poetry itself might show imperfections. These are both lessons which Poliziano seems to have applied to his own work even prior to his Statius lectures. Poliziano proudly proclaimed that he had composed the *Fabula di Orfeo* in the space of a few days; as Francesco Bausi has noted,⁵⁴ Poliziano probably intends this as a sort of quotation of Statius's letter dedicating to his friend Stella his collected *Silvae*—Statius had claimed that “nullum enim ex illis biduo longius tractum” (“none of them took longer than a couple of days to compose”).⁵⁵ Clearly, Poliziano would not have sought or appreciated credit for having arrived at any metaphysical truths on the wings of poetic frenzy; the *Orfeo* itself shows on the contrary his growing skepticism about that prospect. Nevertheless he did want recognition for the virtuosity implied by such a feat.⁵⁶

The oration on Statius and Quintilian also further illustrates that Poliziano's conception of the dichotomy *furor*—*ars* is quite different from Ficino's. As we have seen, Ficino unequivocally declares that true poetry is based only on *furor*; he implies, moreover, that *ars* and *furor* are mutually exclusive. Poliziano appreciates what he identifies as the frenzy that Statius tapped in writing the *Silvae*, but he also praises the *Silvae* for their stylistic variety, rhetorical subtlety, skillful use of metaphor—in short, for the literary craftsmanship that Poliziano, unlike Ficino, valorizes:

... Cum singulae ipsae quae *Sylvae* inscribuntur singula a se invicem disiuncta argumenta continerent, earumque fines haud ita multos intra versus includerentur, nihil profecto sibi reliqui facere ad industriam circumspectionemque

it often happens conversely that our writings become worse from excessive attention, and they are worn away rather than polished by the file of revision.” The English translation is my own.

⁵⁴ Angelo Poliziano, *Poesie*, 243, n. 8.

⁵⁵ Statius, *Silvae*, ed. and trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 26–27.

⁵⁶ In the famous letter that he wrote to Carlo Canale discussing the composition of the *Fabula of Orfeo*, Poliziano asks Canale and other readers of the play to bear in mind the rapidity with which it was composed before formulating a critical judgment. The letter is published in Angelo Poliziano, *Poesie*, 243–244.

poeta debuit, cum et tantae rerum de quibus ageretur varietati respondendum videret, et haud longo in opere somnum obrepere sibi nefas existimaret. Itaque ut omnem facillime culpam praestari ab eo intelligas, nihil in illis non sagacissime inventum, non prudentissime dispositum est, nullus non tentatus locus atque excussus, unde aliqua modo voluptas eliceretur. Elocutionis autem ornamenta atque lumina tot tantaque exposuit, ita sententiis popularis, verbis nitidus, figuris iucundus, tralationibus magnificus, grandis resonansque carminibus esse studuit, ut omnia illi facta compositaque ad pompam, omnia ad celebritatem comparata videantur.⁵⁷

It is particularly clear from this passage (though implicit in Poliziano's other remarks about the *Silvae* as well) that Poliziano regarded the *Silvae* as exceptional as examples not only of poetic frenzy, but of poetic artifice as well. Poliziano did not regard *furor* and *ars* as not mutually exclusive, but rather as complementary.

As his remarks about Statius clearly show, Poliziano did not reject the theory of poetic frenzy *per se*. What he did object to was Ficino's tendency to link this theory with the figure of Orpheus and with an Orphic vision of poetry. The particular features of Ficino's Orphism that Poliziano refused to accept include the ideas that the inspired poet becomes a mouthpiece for verses that flow unmediated from a divine source, that inspiration and artifice are therefore mutually exclusive, and that all true poetry serves to spiritually elevate its readers and listeners. Poliziano proposed Statius as an alternative model practitioner of poetic frenzy—one whose example, unlike that of Orpheus, his fellow humanist poets could realistically hope to follow.

As is well known, Poliziano's admiration for Statius can also be seen in his choice to title a number of his own Latin compositions *Silvae*: the

⁵⁷ *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, 872–873. "Since the individual poems which are entitled *Silvae* contain topics that are completely different one from the next, and the boundaries of these poems are limited to a small number of verses, the poet certainly couldn't afford to spare himself any diligent effort and careful consideration. For he saw that his stylistic variety needed to match the great variety of topics that he was dealing with, and he considered it unacceptable to succumb to drowsiness in composing so short a work. And so (in order that you might understand that every fault was willingly admitted by the poet) there is nothing in these poems that was not invented very skillfully, nothing which was not arranged very prudently, no passage that was not tested and examined so that delight could be coaxed forth from it. He showed so many great ornaments of speech and flashes of brilliance, he was so popular in his thoughts, so bright in his words, so pleasant in his figures of speech, so magnificent in his metaphors, and he took care to be great and resounding in his poems, so that everything that he wrote seems to have been composed for display, carefully arranged to achieve renown." The English translation is my own.

Sylva in scabiem and the four poetic *praelusiones* that he wrote between 1482 and 1486. In these *praelusiones* we can observe a subsequent and more mature phase in the evolution of Poliziano's effort to rethink Ficino's adaptation of Plato's *furor poeticus*.

The originality of the theory of poetic inspiration that Poliziano sketches in the *Silvae* depends on a brilliant reworking of a metaphor from Plato's *Ion*. Plato's Socrates (whose ironic tone was in this case lost on Ficino and perhaps even on Poliziano) proposed the image of a magnet holding a series of rings attached one to the next as a metaphor for the chain of inspiration by which a god inspires the poet, the poet inspires the rhapsodes who recite his poems, and these rhapsodes inspire their audiences. Here are Socrates's words to Ion:

And are you aware that your spectator is the last of the rings which I spoke of as receiving from each other the power transmitted from the Heracleian lodestone? You, the rhapsode and actor, are the middle ring; the poet himself is the first; but it is the god who through the whole series draws the souls of men whithersoever he pleases, making the power of one depend on the other.⁵⁸

With characteristic attention to historical context, Poliziano recognizes that Plato's metaphor derives from a culture in which poetry was primarily oral, recited to audiences by professional rhapsodes who memorized but did not compose poetry. This insight into the discrepancy between Plato's culture and that of Quattrocento Florence, which Ficino seems not to have noted, led Poliziano to modify the metaphor in an important way, as Donatella Coppini has observed.⁵⁹ In Poliziano's *Nutricia*, the poetic frenzy is transmitted not orally, but through writing:

Ipsaque Niliacis longum mandata papyris
carmina Phoebeos videas afflare furores
et caeli spirare fidem; quin sancta legentem
concutiunt parili turbam contagia moto
deque aliis alios idem proseminat ardor
pectoris instinctu vates, ceu ferreus olim
anulus, arcana quem vi Magnesia cautes
sustulerat, longam nexu pendente catenam
implicat et caecis inter se conserit hamis.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Plato, *Ion* 536A, trans. W. R. M. Lamb (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1925), 427–29.

⁵⁹ Coppini, "L'ispirazione per contagio," 127–164.

⁶⁰ *Nutricia*, vv. 188–196. "You could see that the poems themselves, committed long ago to the Nile's papyrus, transmitted the Apollonian inspiration and breathed the music of

Poliziano's modification of the metaphor has another important implication. Whereas in Plato's version the chain of inspiration was hierarchical in that each ring represented a different type of engagement with the poem (poet, rhapsode, audience), in the *Nutricia* this hierarchy disappears: each iron ring stands for a literate poet who reads the work of his predecessors and, inspired by it, produces his own poetry which will in turn inspire his successors. In Poliziano's version the chain becomes infinitely extensible, which enables it to function as a metaphor not for an isolated poetic performance, but for more than two thousand years of the Western literary tradition—the theme of the *Nutricia*. The Platonic metaphor that Ficino treasured as an illustration of the direct link to the divine that could be achieved through poetry becomes in Poliziano's hands a metaphor for the historically contingent process of literary influence.

I do not believe, however, that it is Poliziano's intention to reduce Plato's metaphor to an illustration of a merely mechanical process of transmission of poetic conceits. This would imply that he retains the language of poetic frenzy only as a quaint but discredited vestige. Particularly in light of the fact that Poliziano titles his *praelusiones*, including the *Nutricia*, *Silvae*, thereby emphasizing a continuity with his teachings on Statius, Poliziano appears to be building upon, rather than refuting, the ideas about poetic frenzy that he had proposed in that earlier context. There he had theorized that individuals of a certain disposition possess an innate capacity for unleashing verse in a poetic frenzy. Now he elaborates that poets become inflamed with this poetic frenzy not in isolation, but when they read the inspiring works of the great poets who came before them. This transmission of frenzy through reading is, significantly, a phenomenon necessarily restricted to educated poets, and does not provide for the possibility, trumpeted by Ficino, that an unlearned man could produce great poetry through frenzy.

It is clear that Poliziano adopts, in the *Nutricia*, language that his Florentine contemporaries would readily have associated with Ficino's theory of poetic frenzy. Alongside the commonplaces that would allow the informed reader to recognize the reference to the Platonic theory,

the celestial lyre; indeed a sacred contagion excites the throng of readers with a like enthusiasm and the same ardor passes from one poet to engender inspiration in the heart of others, like the iron ring lifted up by the hidden force of a Magnesian stone that attaches to itself a long chain in a pendant bond and fastens them together with invisible hooks." The English translation is taken from Angelo Poliziano, *Silvae*, ed. and trans. Charles Fantazzi (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 122–25.

Poliziano introduces definite variations through which he indicates how his own understanding of the phenomenon differs from Ficino's. This is also true of the other passage from the *Silvae* in which Poliziano employs Plato's magnetic chain metaphor—at the opening of the *Ambra*, where he celebrates the poetic primacy of Homer:

... cur non totum in praeconia solvam
 Maeonidae magni, cuius de gurgite vivo
 combibit arcanos vaturn omnis turba furores?
 Utque laboriferi ferrum lapis Herculis alte
 erigit et longos Chlybum procul implicat orbes
 vimque suam aspirat cunctis, ita prorsus ab uno
 impetus ille sacer vaturn dependet Homero.
 Ille, Iovis mensae accumbens, dat pocula nobis
 Iliaca porrecta manu, quae triste repellant
 annorum senium vitamque in saecula propagent.⁶¹

A commentary on Poliziano's *Ambra* written by his contemporary Petreio provides excellent evidence of how an informed reader of the time responded to this passage—precisely by noting both the reference to Ficino's popular interpretation of Plato's and Poliziano's originality with respect to Ficino and Plato:

FUORES ARCANOS... homini ignotos vel venerandos. De furore divino multa apud Platonem leges; de eodem Marsilius noster Ficinus in *Epistolis*. UTQUE LABORIFERI FERRUM. Comparatio sumpta ex Platone in rem diversam. Ille enim ait bonos poetas ita omnes furore divino attrahi, ut ferrum a magnete lapide; Policianus autem per licentiam, quae poetae conceditur, dicit ex uno Homero ceteros poetas pendere, veluti ex lapide magnete dependent complures annuli ferrei. 'Herculeum' autem 'lapidem' magnetem appellat; sic enim dictum ab Euripide eum esse Plato auctor est, quod vi quadam herculea, idest heroica, in attrahendo utatur. Hoc apud Latinos, ni fallor, alibi nusquam reperies.⁶²

⁶¹ *Ambra*, vv. 11–20. "...Why should I not devote all of this to the praise of the great Maeonian, from whose fresh-flowing torrent the whole throng of poets imbibed their secret frenzies? As the stone of the laboring Hercules draws the iron upwards and intertwines at a distance the long rings of metal and breathes its power into them all, so the sacred impulse of poets depends entirely on Homer alone. He, reclining at the table of Jupiter, gives us to drink from cups offered by the Trojan youth that drive away the sad decrepitude of the years and prolong life into eternity." *Silvae*, 70–71.

⁶² *Un commento inedito all'Ambra del Poliziano*, ed. Alessandro Perosa (Rome: Bulzoni, 1994), 8–9. "FUORES ARCANOS: ... unknown to man or worthy of veneration. You will read many things concerning divine frenzy in Plato's writings. Our own Marsilio Ficino writes about the same topic in his *Letters*. UTQUE LABORIFERI FERRUM: This is a simile taken from Plato and applied to a different thing. For Plato says that all poets are attracted

Petreio is right to note that Poliziano is taking a certain amount of liberty in his adaptation of Plato's metaphor. For in the metaphor as it appears in the *Ion* Plato compares Homer to one of the intermediate iron rings of the magnetic chain, not to the magnet. It is instead the Muse whose role Plato says is analogous to that of the magnet, in that the Muse infuses force into the great poets—notably Homer, but not Homer alone: Plato also mentions Orpheus and Musaeus by name.⁶³ Therefore, as noted above, Plato sees each individual poetic performance as analogous to the formation of a new magnetic chain involving a direct point of contact between the inspiring Muse and an original poet (like Homer or Orpheus), who in turn inspires the rhapsode who has memorized that poet's work.

There are several probable motivating factors behind Poliziano's decision to modify Plato's simile to make Homer correspond not to one of many iron rings but rather to the magnet itself. On one level this can be seen as a strategy for praising Homer, in keeping with the goals of the *Ambra*, which was written as an encomium to Homer. It is also possible that Poliziano intends to communicate here a more specific critical judgment about the nature of Homer's poetry. Poliziano was, after all, Quattrocento Italy's greatest authority on Homer. As discussed above, he had worked for seven years in his youth on the ambitious task of translating the *Iliad* into Latin verse (completing four books). 1485, the year of the *Ambra*'s composition, marked the first of five consecutive years in which Poliziano would lecture on the Homeric poems at the Florentine Studio.⁶⁴ His Homeric expertise not only meant that Poliziano understood, better than any of his colleagues, the massive role that imitation of Homer (direct or indirect) had played in shaping the literary tradition. It also meant that Poliziano was in a position to verify that Homer himself, and

by a divine frenzy, as iron is attracted by a magnet. Poliziano, taking poetic license, says that all other poets are dependent on one poet—Homer—, just as many iron rings hang down from a magnet. But he calls the magnet the 'Herculean stone.' For Plato attests that it is called this by Euripides, because in attracting it uses a kind of 'Herculean' force—that is to say, a heroic force. If I am not mistaken you will not find this in any other Latin writer." The English translation is my own.

⁶³ "One poet is suspended from one Muse, another from another: the word we use for it is 'possessed,' but it is much the same thing, for he is *held*. And from these first rings—the poets—are suspended various others, which are thus inspired, some by Orpheus and others by Musaeus; but the majority are possessed and held by Homer." Plato, *Ion* 536A–B.

⁶⁴ See Lucia Cesarini Martinelli, "Poliziano professore allo Studio fiorentino," in *La Toscana al tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico. Politica Economia Cultura Arte. Atti del Convegno di Studi promosso dalle Università di Firenze, Pisa e Siena (5–8 novembre 1992)* (Pisa: Pacini editore, 1996), vol. 2, 463–81.

he alone, did not depend on any surviving literary models. Recognizing that the Homeric poems occupy a unique historical position at the horizon beyond which his philological instruments could not peer, he allows himself, in the *Ambra*, to imagine a direct point of contact between the great Homer and the divine realm.

In the wake of the pivotal Homeric scholarship of the twentieth century (in particular the comparative studies conducted by Millman Parry and Alfred Lord in the Balkans)⁶⁵ there is now general agreement that the Homeric poems represent a uniquely successful intersection of two modes of textual transmission that rarely overlap within a given society: on the one hand, a highly refined art of extemporaneous oral composition; on the other, the technology of the written word. In light of this, it is interesting to note that when Poliziano studied ancient biographies of Homer, he seems to have been interested in precisely this issue—the interplay between improvised oral poetry and written composition. The following is an excerpt from the *Oratio in expositione Homeri*, which Poliziano wrote around the same time as the *Ambra* (Autumn 1485), and delivered for the same university course:

Neque vero non et illud in poeta hoc caelestis plane immortalisque naturae lumen effulget, quod pulcherrima illa carmina, quae iure aetas omnis mirata est, illaborata ipsi adque extemporanea fluebant vivoque, ut ita dixerim, gurgite exundabant, cum e diverso mantuanum poetam paucissimos die composuisse versus auctor sit Varus; extantque adhuc non pauca canente illo excepta poemata quae, prout a quoque bene maleque acceptus fuerat, continuo in eum subito quodam repentinoque instinctu et ferente, ut aiunt, flatu, proferebantur, ut facile intelligantur non quasi sub incudem venisse humanae fabricae, sed divino quodam impulsu instinctuque velut e cortina atque adyto sacris esse escussa praecordiis, ut iam dubitandum nullo pacto sit quin vere de illo Democritus naturae rerum conscius praedicaverit:

Ομηρος φυσῶς λαχὼν θεαζοίσης ἐπεὼν κόσμον ἐτεκτῆνατο παντοίων.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ See Alfred Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).

⁶⁶ Angelo Poliziano, *Oratio in expositione Homeri*, ed. Paola Megna (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007), 13–14. “Certainly that light of a heavenly and clearly immortal nature shines in this poet, because those most beautiful songs, which every age has rightly admired, flowed to him without labor and spontaneously, and (as thus I have said) gushed forth with a living flood, while by contrast Varus has it that the Mantuan poet [Virgil] composed very few verses in a day. There exist to this day many poems transcribed while that man was singing (exactly as he had been heard by whoever it was, well or badly), which were placed into him by a certain sudden and unexpected inspiration and (as they say) with a spirit bearing them, so that they are easily perceived not to have come, as it were, from the anvil of human craft, but rather to have been sent forth from his sacred breast with a certain divine impulse and inspiration, as if from an oracle’s cauldron or shrine,

Poliziano's comments here derive mainly from his studies of the pseudo-Herodotean *Life of Homer*, where he read that Homer had improvised much of his poetry, and that a certain Thestorides had transcribed his *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as he sang them.⁶⁷ In describing Homer's ability to compose extemporaneously, Poliziano uses terms that recall his earlier praise for Statius's skill as an improviser: Statius composed in a "subito calore" ("sudden zeal")—Homer composed "subito...repentinoque instinctu" ("in a sudden and hasty inspiration"). Hence the passage provides further evidence that Poliziano's remarks about poetic frenzy in his *Silvae* (contemporaneous with this *Oratio*) should not be mistaken for a recantation of the concept of poetic inspiration that he had formulated while teaching Statius's *Silvae*.

The fact that Poliziano cites approvingly the anecdote that Thestorides had been responsible for committing Homer's epics to writing offers another attestation of his particular interest in the transmissibility of this type of frenzy. Poliziano, it seems, situated Homer at the beginning of the magnetic chain of inspired poets because he believed that Homer alone had cultivated poetic frenzy without the benefit of a written model to learn from. Once Homer's work had been fortuitously written down, all later poets would derive both their technique and their inspiration from the literary tradition he had founded.

When Poliziano, at the beginning of his career as university professor, adopted the terminology of *furor poeticus* to praise the compositional style of Statius's *Silvae*, his colleagues (and in particular his many associates who identified themselves with Ficino's Platonic revival) must have easily understood that he was deliberately proposing a new interpretation of the phenomenon, quite distant from Ficino's. After all, Statius's stylized occasional poetry could hardly be mistaken for the utterances of an inspired contemplative. When Poliziano discussed the "poetic frenzy" of Homer, however, his stance vis-à-vis Platonism, ancient and contemporary, may have appeared less clear. After all, late-antique Neoplatonists had emphasized the supposedly inspired nature of Homer's poetry precisely in order to justify reading Homer's poems allegorically

so that by now it is by no means to be doubted that Democritus, aware of the nature of things, proclaimed rightly of him: "Homer, endowed with a divinely nature, fashioned an ornament of verses of every kind." The English translation is my own. Megna discusses the significance of this passage in the introduction to her edition, lxxvi–lxxvii.

⁶⁷ An English translation of the pseudo-Herodotean *Life of Homer* can be found in Theodore Alois Buckley, trans. *The Odyssey of Homer, with the Hymns, Epigrams, and Battle of the Frogs and Mice* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853), v–xxxii.

as repositories of philosophical wisdom. In Poliziano's lifetime Cristoforo Landino had achieved renown for applying the very same approach first to Virgil and subsequently to Dante. The fact that Landino himself had not explicated Homer in this way was almost certainly due, quite simply, to his lack of expertise in Greek.⁶⁸ The epic poems most beloved to Porphyry and Proclus were therefore a significant part of Greek Neoplatonic culture that the Florentines of Ficino's circle had yet to fully reclaim through Platonizing allegory.

When Poliziano declares that Homer was able to channel poetic frenzy, however, he is decidedly not signaling his intention to fill this lacuna. The goals and methods of Poliziano's mature Homeric scholarship are fundamentally alien to the interests that Ficino and Landino brought to the reading of "inspired" poets. To be sure, Poliziano marvels at the depth of Homer's erudition, which he praises as encyclopedic and even, indulging in hyperbole, "divine." He does not, however, argue that Homer used poetic frenzy to understand the mysteries of divinity. During the period of his

⁶⁸ Landino explicitly states that Homer's poems contained the same allegorical meanings that his own teaching and writings identified in the *Aeneid*. See, for instance, the following passage from book 3 of the *Disputationes Camaldulenses*: "Is igitur in eo volumine, quod de summo bono scripsit, omnes artes, sive divinae sive humanae illae sint, in unum Homeri poema veluti in proprium receptaculum confluisse affirmat. Quam ob rem inanimadvertens Maro doctrinam huius hominis ex Aegyptiorum sacerdotum fontibus haustam simillimam cum Platonis, quorum studiosissimus fuit, rationem habere eam usque adeo admiratus est, ut idem in suo Aenea efficere voluerit, quod ille antea in Ulixie finxerat. Quapropter pulcherrimis poeticisque figmentis eum nobis virum informavit, qui plurimis ac maximis vitiis paulatim expiatus ac deinceps miris virtutibus illustratus id, quod summum homini bonum est quodque nisi sapiens nullus assequi potest, tandem assequeretur. Verum cum illud in rerum divinarum speculatione consistere a Platone didicisset, simul et illud didicit eo antea minime perveniri posse, quam animi nostri virtutibus illis quae de vita et moribus sunt expiati penitus reddantur, cum Socrates ipse purum impuro attingere fas esse neget" ("Therefore in that work which he wrote concerning the highest good, he says that all the arts, human and divine, have flowed together into one poem of Homer, as into their own proper receptacle. For this reason Virgil, noticing that the wisdom which Homer had drunk from the fountains of the Egyptian priests was very similar to the Platonic wisdom, of which he himself [Virgil] was a most zealous follower, he was so astonished that Homer possessed that knowledge that he decided to write about his Aeneas the same thing that Homer had previously written about Ulysses. Therefore he fashioned for us, with very beautiful and poetic fictions, this man who gradually atoned for numerous sins of the most serious kind, and afterward, having been illuminated by marvelous virtues, finally attains that which is the highest good for man, and which no one except the wise man can obtain. But since he had learned from Plato that this consists in the contemplation of divine things, he also learned at that same time that this cannot be obtained before our souls are restored inwardly, having been purified by those virtues which concern life and habits, since Socrates himself affirms that it is not allowed for the impure to touch the pure"). Cristoforo Landino, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, 118–119.

youth in which he studied philosophy with Ficino while devoting most of his time to translating the *Iliad*, Poliziano had indeed been briefly inclined to seek out secrets of divine ascent in the poems of the great Homer, as is attested by a few of the notes which he included in two manuscript copies of his translation. Glossing the scene in the fifth book of the *Iliad* in which Diomedes wounds Venus's hand, Poliziano offers an original interpretation of the scene in Platonic terms: "Venus in manu vulneratur quoniam celestis illa venus platonis cum in sensu tangendi polluitur vulgaris evadit" ("Venus is wounded in the hand because that heavenly Venus of Plato, when she is wounded in the sense of touch becomes vulgar").⁶⁹ Poliziano at this early phase is writing as a student of Ficino: *Venus Coelestis* and *Venus Vulgaris* are the Latin names that Ficino had coined in his *De amore* to translate the Greek names *Aphrodite Ourania* and *Aphrodite Pandemos* of Plato's *Symposium*.

Ficino must have been very pleased with his pupil's reading, and perhaps allowed himself to hope that the young Homeric prodigy would go on to develop and promote an interpretation of the Homeric poems as allegorical monuments of Platonic wisdom produced by a divinely inspired poet—precisely as Landino had done with the *Aeneid* and would go on to do with the *Divine Comedy*. Poliziano, however, would take a different path. During the five years in which he lectured on Homer at Florence's university, Poliziano uncovered, with ever-increasing philological acuity, a wealth of knowledge about the ancient world contained within Homer's poems.⁷⁰ He showed no interest in mining Homer for insights into the transcendent world.

The references to poetic frenzy which continue to appear in his work well into this later phase are therefore best understood not as signs of lingering affinity for Ficino's Orphic idea of poetry, but as evidence of Poliziano's interest in reaching his own understanding of the significance of the exhilarating rush of poetic inspiration that he himself evidently

⁶⁹ The manuscript note is published in Alice Levine Rubinstein, "The Notes to Poliziano's *Iliad*," *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 25 (1982): 205–239. Rubinstein notes the connection to Ficino's *De amore*.

⁷⁰ Paola Megna, in her edition of the *Oratio in expositione Homeri*, lxxiv–lxxv, notes the lack of interest that Poliziano, in this and subsequent works, shows toward allegorical interpretation of Homer. On Poliziano's Homeric studies, see also Léon Dorez, "L'hellénisme d'Ange Politien," *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 15 (1895): 24–28; Innocente Toppani, "Poliziano e Omero," *Studi triestini di antichità in onore di Luigia Achillea Stella*. (Trieste: Università degli studi di Trieste, 1975), 470–80; Perrine Galand-Hallyn, *Les yeux de l'éloquence: Poétiques humanistes de l'évidence* (Orléans: Paradigme, 1995).

experienced. These references, taken together, suggest that Poliziano came to regard poetic frenzy as a talent for extemporaneous composition which could be nourished (in poets possessing the right sort of innate disposition) by reading the great poets of the past, all of whom bear traces, variously mediated and reworked, of the poetic harmony first fashioned by the great Homer.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE ENEMY:
OLD AND NEW EMPIRES BETWEEN HUMANIST DEBATES AND
TASSO'S *GERUSALEMME LIBERATA*

Andrea Moudarres

Venient annis
secula seris, quibus Oceanus
vincula rerum laxet, & ingens
pateat tellus Tiphisque novos
detegat orbes, nec sit terris
ultima Thule.
(Seneca, *Medea* 375–379)

Et alias oves habeo, quae non sunt ex hoc ovili:
et illas oportet me adducere, et vocem meam audient,
et fiet unum ovile et unus pastor.
(John 10:16)¹

Introduction

The apparent containment of multiplicity in Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* has often been considered a reflection of the crusaders' victory over the Muslims and of Goffredo's repression of the humanistic-chivalric lures epitomized by Rinaldo and his ill-fated doubles, Argillano and Svenio. Likewise, the domestication of romance and individualism in the epic structure of the poem supposedly mirrors the conversions to Christianity of the female characters in the enemy camp: Clorinda, who is also killed by her lover Tancredi, Erminia, and, above all, Armida, who in the last canto of the poem seems to experience an unlikely and sudden rebirth

¹ "During the last years of the world,/ the time will come in which Oceanus/ will loosen the bounds, and a huge landmass/ will appear; Tiphys will discover new worlds,/ and Thule will no longer be the most remote land." *Medea* 375–79. "I have other sheep who are not from this fold and I must bring them, and they will hear my voice and there will be one fold and one shepherd." John 10: 16. Both passages are quoted by Christopher Columbus in his *Libro de las Prophecías*. See Christopher Columbus, *The Book of Prophecies Edited by Christopher Columbus*, ed. Roberto Rusconi, trans. Blair Sullivan (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 290–91 and 296–97, respectively. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are the editors'.

from sorceress to God's handmaiden. According to the overarching motif of this reading, the process that leads to the submission of unorthodox forces expresses an unapologetically Eurocentric vision of power relations, entrenched in the Catholic tenets of the Counter-Reformation. Despite the partly sympathetic portraits of some of the vanquished, Tasso's solidarity with the enemies has been diagnosed primarily on psychological grounds as the reflex of a repressed inclination, while his superseding ideology has been branded as imperialistic in rather unmistakable terms.²

This perspective certainly highlights fundamental features of Tasso's thought—both with regard to the religious conflicts that plagued the sixteenth century and to the revival of Aristotle's *Poetica*—and effectively evokes the poet's personal restlessness. However, an alternative analysis of the text in relation to its cultural background and to some of the opinions about the American Indians that he expressed in the *Dialoghi* can provide a complementary interpretation of Tasso's political theology. In this essay, I argue that although the *Gerusalemme liberata* does reflect the temptation to picture a unified world under the "santi segni" ("holy standards") of a Christian Empire,³ it also deliberately exposes the precariousness of such global order, voicing the author's dismay at the friend-enemy dichotomy fiercely enacted in the battle for Jerusalem.⁴ While Tasso was no harbinger of cultural relativism, the ideological thrust of his Christian epic does not appear univocal and reveals the underlying tensions that

² See Sergio Zatti, *L'uniforme cristiano e il multiforme pagano* (Milan: Il saggiatore, 1983); idem, "Tasso e il nuovo mondo," *Italianistica* 24: 2–3 (Maggio/Dicembre 1995): 501–521; and idem, "Dalla parte di Satana: sull'imperialismo cristiano nella 'Gerusalemme Liberata,'" in *La rappresentazione dell'altro nei testi del Rinascimento*, ed. Sergio Zatti (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi Editore, 1998), 146–182, which re-elaborates the substance of the argument previously articulated by adopting the opposite perspective of Satan's speech in canto 4; David Quint, *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 214–247. See also Franco Cardini, *L'invenzione del Nemico* (Palermo: Sellerio editore, 2006), 186–194; Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History: the Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 81–133; and Paul Larivaille, *Poesia e ideologia. Letture della "Gerusalemme Liberata"* (Naples: Liguori, 1987), 111–129.

³ *Gerusalemme liberata* 1.1. Hereafter cited as *GL*. Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1996). All translations are from Torquato Tasso, *Jerusalem Delivered*, ed. and trans. Ralph Nash (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987).

⁴ Among the scholars who express a more skeptical view of Tasso's apparent efforts to suppress the romance component of the *Liberata*, see Barbara Fuchs, *Mimesis and Empire: The New World, Islam, and European Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 24–34; JoAnn Cavallo, "Tasso's Armida and the Victory of Romance," in *Renaissance Transactions: Ariosto and Tasso*, ed. Valeria Finucci (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 77–111; Francesco Erpamer, "Il 'pensiero debole' di Torquato Tasso," in *La menzogna*, ed. Franco Cardini (Florence: Ponte alle Grazie, 1989), 120–136.

characterized the burgeoning political, religious, and geographical self-awareness of modern Europe. In the *Gerusalemme liberata*, Tasso captures a lucid and multifaceted snapshot of the same *nomos* of the earth that, nearly four hundred years later, the controversial German jurist Carl Schmitt would enthusiastically label as the triumph of “occidental rationalism” and “scientific culture.”⁵ This order, centered in the Atlantic and gravitating between the European powers and America, has roughly corresponded to the conventional image of Western civilization that, despite its violent contradictions, has survived until the beginning of the twenty-first century and is now challenged by formidable epochal currents.

The roots of Tasso’s conflicted projection of the dramatic changes that occurred in the Early Modern Age are grounded in the humanistic debates that animated primarily—but by no means exclusively—the intellectual life of the Italian peninsula. These controversies accompanied, ensued, and in some cases preceded two historic turning points whose repercussions spread throughout the world: the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, followed by the siege of Vienna in 1529 and the battle of Lepanto in 1571, and Columbus’s voyage to the West Indies, with the subsequent Spanish occupation of the new continent in the early decades of the sixteenth century. These momentous events fostered the renewal and problematization of two key medieval concepts: the legacy of Rome as a World Empire and the characterization of Islam not as an autonomous religion, but as a limb torn from the universal body of the Catholic Church. While the *Gerusalemme liberata* narrates the Crusade as part of a strife between good and evil and relates its heroes’ pilgrimage toward the salvation offered by the Holy Sepulcher in the city whose etymology means “vision of peace,”⁶ it also shows the limits of any human political undertaking,

⁵ Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G. L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press Publishing 2006), 132. Cf. Denis Cosgrove, *Apollo’s Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

⁶ As Isidore of Seville writes, “Pro futura vero patriae pace Hierusalem vocatur. Nam Hierusalem pacis visio interpretatur. Ibi enim absorpta omni adversitate pacem, quae est Christus, praesenti possidebit obtutu” (“And in accordance with the future peace of the homeland it [the Church] is called Jerusalem, for ‘Jerusalem’ is translated as ‘vision of peace.’ There, when all hostility has been overwhelmed, one will possess peace, which is Christ, by gazing upon him face to face”) *Etymologiae* 8.1.6. The Latin text was consulted electronically at <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/isidore.shtml>. English translations are from Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, trans. S. Barney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

including the long-established vision of Empire as the bulwark of global unity and peace.

The reshaped boundaries of the European geographical imaginary encompassed an old foe and a new “other” (and potential enemy): the Muslims and the American Indians. In the following pages, I will consider these two forms of alterity and frame them within the enduring aspiration to a world government. Before delving into Tasso’s poem, I will examine how the two portraits of otherness were characterized in both political and theological terms during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Charles V’s World Empire between Jerusalem and America

In canto 35 of the *Orlando furioso*, after touring the moon in search of Orlando’s wits, Saint John says to the paladin Astolfo that poets can grant fame to princes and emperors even when they do not deserve it (*OF* 35. 20–30). In this critique of the rhetoric of power surrounding the Roman Empire, the names of Aeneas and Augustus figure prominently in the Evangelist’s list of undeserving rulers: “Non sì pietoso Enea” (“Aeneas was not as devoted”)⁷ and “Non fu sì tanto santo né benigno Augusto/come la tuba di Virgilio suona” (“Augustus was not as august and beneficent as Virgil makes him out in clarion tones”).⁸ If the Este family appears to bear the brunt of this insinuation, it would seem appropriate for a savvy author like Ariosto to choose a more ambitious target, one whose power could actually surpass or at least come close to that of a Caesar. A passage from canto 15, which was added in the final edition of the *Orlando furioso* in 1532, gives us a hint of who might be the recipient of Ariosto’s criticism. After celebrating the new Argonauts who journeyed beyond the pillars of Hercules, across the Atlantic, in pursuit of India and discovered a previously unknown continent,⁹ Ariosto praises the emperor Charles V:

Veggio la Santa Croce: e veggio i segni
imperial: nel verde lito eretti:
veggio altri a guardia de i battuti legni
altri all’acquisto del paese: eletti,
veggio da dieci cacciar mille: e i regni

⁷ *Orlando furioso* 35.25. Hereafter cited as *OF*. Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1997). All translations are from Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, trans. Guido Waldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁸ *OF* 35.26.

⁹ *Ibid.* 15.21–22.

di là da l'India ad Aragon soggetti:
e veggio i Capitan di Carlo quinto
dovunque vanno haver per tutto vinto.

Dio vuol ch'ascosa antiquamente questa
strada sia stata: e anchor gran tempo stia,
ne che prima si sappia che la sesta
e la settima età passata sia,
e serba a farla al tempo manifesta
che vorra porre il mondo a Monarchia,
sotto il più saggio Imperatore e giusto
che sia stato o sara mai: dopo Augusto.

Del sangue d'Austria e d'Aragon io veggio
nascere su'l Reno alla sinistra riva
un Principe: al valor del qual Pareggio
nessun valor: di cui si parli o scriva.
Astrea veggio per lui riposta in seggio
anzi di morta ritornata viva:
e le virtù che cacciò il mondo: quando
lei cacciò anchora, uscir per lui di bando.

Per questi meriti la bontà suprema
non solamente di quel grande impero
ha disegnato c'habbia Diadema
c'hebbe Augusto Traian Marco e Severo
ma d'ogni terra e quinci e quindi estrema
che mai né al sol né all'anno apre il sentiero
e vuol che sotto a questo imperatore
solo un'ovile sia, solo un pastore.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid. 15,23–26. "I see the Holy Cross and the imperial standards set up on the verdant shore; some guard the storm-tossed ships, others are taking possession of the territory; they are picked men—I see ten of them routing a thousand, and kingdoms beyond the Indies being subjected to Aragon; and I see Charles V's captains sweeping all before them./ God willed that this route should in the past have remained concealed, and should so continue for still many a year: not before the sixth and seventh ages have elapsed shall it become known, for He has reserved its discovery until the day when He places the world under the monarchy of the wisest and most just emperor who ever lived or shall live, after Augustus./ I see the birth of a prince on the left bank of the Rhine; in his veins flows the blood of Austria and Aragon, and no valour ever mentioned in speech or writing can compare with his. I see Astrea restored from death to life; and the virtues, too, which the world banished when it banished her, shall return from exile by his power./ Because of such merits the Supreme Good has awarded him the crown of the great empire once ruled over by Augustus, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, and Septimus Severus; not only this, but also that he should rule over every land East and West, however far flung, that sees the sun and the passage of the year. He wills that under this emperor there should be but one fold, one shepherd."

This long quotation condenses the ideological drive that underpins the resurgence of the idea of World Empire at the time of Charles V's reign, after the consolidation of the Spanish settlements in the West Indies. Ariosto notes that the new Habsburg sovereign, who inherited the title of Holy Roman Emperor, extended his rule on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond. Although outnumbered by the indigenous populations, Columbus's successors, including Hernán Cortés (whose name is mentioned in stanza 27), managed to conquer large swaths of the new continent. As a result of these missions, Charles V could legitimately be considered an epigone of Augustus and, according to God's plan, he is destined to establish a world monarchy ("vorrà porre il mondo a monarchia,/ sotto il più saggio imperatore e giusto/ che sia stato o sarà mai dopo Augusto"). Astrea, a symbol of justice in Virgil's fourth *Eclogue*, will thus be brought back to life ("Astrea veggio per lui riposta in seggio,/ anzi di morta ritornata viva").¹¹ The passage quoted above culminates with a reference to a verse from the Gospel of John, in which the unification of mankind is prophesied ("e vuol che sotto a questo imperatore/ solo un ovile sia, solo un pastore").

In 1530, just three years after the humiliation of the sack of Rome at the hands of the German mercenaries hired by Charles, pope Clement VII crowned the young emperor as a new Charlemagne in Bologna. Shortly after completing the third edition of his masterpiece in 1532, Ariosto accompanied his patron Alfonso d'Este to meet Charles V in Mantua and gave him a copy of his Carolingian epic, the *Orlando furioso*. Embedded in this gift was the poet's witty rebuke of those who wield political power. While it would be tempting to attribute Ariosto's parallel between Charles V and Augustus to poetic license, sheer flattery, or to his proverbial irony, the myth of a global (and Catholic) government that could revive Rome's vestiges and ensure peace was persistently called forth. It remained a significant *topos* in Renaissance political rhetoric through the fifteenth century and lived on at least until the early seventeenth century, as pope

¹¹ Cf. Virgil, *Eclogue* 4. 4–10. On the idea of Astrea in relation to Charles V, see Frances Yates, *Astrea: the Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 22–23, and Sergio Zatti, "Tasso e il nuovo mondo," 504–508, neither of whom detects a hint of Ariosto's criticism. See also Theodore J. Cachey, "Maps and Literature in Renaissance Italy," in D. Woodward, ed., *History of Cartography* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), vol. 3, part 1, 450–460, especially 458, who does in fact discern a polemical note in Ariosto's praise. On the presence of the fourth *Eclogue* in Renaissance Humanism, see Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 60–132.

Pius II's *De ortu et auctoritate imperii romani*, Marsilio Ficino's translation of Dante's *Monarchia* into the vernacular, and Tommaso Campanella's appeals to world unity make plain.¹²

In the same years during which Ariosto revised the *Orlando furioso*, a few statesmen at the court of Charles V were crafting the narrative of this imperial ideology. The most active among these figures was the Piedmontese humanist Mercurino di Gattinara, Charles's most trusted and influential advisor, who loyally served the sovereign as Grand Chancellor from 1518 until his death in 1530, four months after Charles was crowned Emperor.¹³ From our standpoint, the most noteworthy step that Gattinara took to advance his agenda is probably his invitation to Erasmus to edit the critical edition of Dante's *Monarchia*.¹⁴ The great Dutch thinker, who espoused an irenic vision of history and who had already authored a

¹² Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II), *On the Origin and Authority of the Roman Empire*, in *Three Tracts on Empire*, ed. and trans. Thomas Izbicki and Cary Nederman (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2000), 95–112. Ficino's translation of the *Monarchia* into the vernacular was recently published in Dante Alighieri, *Monarchia* (Milan: Mondadori, 2004). Tommaso Campanella, *La Città del Sole: Dialogo Poetico*, ed. and trans. Daniel Donno (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981). On Campanella's idea of universal monarchy, see John Headley, *Tommaso Campanella and the Transformation of the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 197–314; and Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Cosmopoiesis: The Renaissance Experiment* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2001), 55–75.

¹³ On this influential player in the sixteenth-century political arena, see John Headley, "The Habsburg World Empire and the Revival of Ghibellinism," *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 7 (1975): 93–127; and idem, *The Emperor and His Chancellor: A Study of the Imperial Chancellery Under Gattinara* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Karl Brandi, *The Emperor Charles V: The Growth and Destiny of a Man and of a World-Empire*, trans. C. V. Wedgwood (London: Cape, 1963), 90–91 and 112–114, where Brandi underscores Gattinara's role as Charles's mentor; Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Sian Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), vol. 2, 672–675; and Carlo Bornate, "L'apogeo della casa di Asburgo e l'opera politica di un Gran Cancelliere di Carlo V," *Nuova Rivista Storica* 3 (1919): 396–439. For the efforts he made to mend the rift between Charles V and the pope, which followed the sack of Rome, Gattinara was appointed cardinal by Clement VII in 1529. Cf. Ludwig von Pastor, *The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages*, ed. Frederick Ignatius Antrobus (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1969), vol. 10, 66–67.

¹⁴ See Gattinara's epistle to Erasmus dated March 12, 1527 in Desiderius Erasmus, *The Correspondence of Erasmus*, trans. R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson, in *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974–2009), letter no. 1790a, vol. 12, 474–476. About a month before this request, Gattinara sent a blunt letter to Erasmus's opponents at the University of Louvain, urging them not to attack the Dutch humanist on the false basis that he was secretly a Lutheran (letter 1784a in the same volume, 452–454). The *editio princeps* of Dante's *Monarchia* would eventually be published in 1559 in a collection of tracts on the Roman Empire: Andrea Alciati, *De formula romani Imperii libri duo* (Basel: Johannes Oporinus, 1559). On the relationship between Gattinara and Erasmus, see John Headley, "Gattinara, Erasmus, and the Imperial Configurations of Humanism," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 71 (1980): 64–98. On the cultural background of Charles V's empire,

tract of political education dedicated to the young Prince Charles in 1516,¹⁵ declined the offer from his friend and fellow alumnus of the University of Turin. Nevertheless, Gattinara's attempt reveals a keen interest in forging a cultural framework within which Charles V's imperial policies in the old and in the new worlds could be supported. The royal emblem chosen to epitomize such a vision features a motto, *Plus Oultre*, and an image representing the pillars of Hercules.¹⁶ Furthermore, at the time of Charles's election in 1519, the Chancellor issued a memorandum in which he mentions the doctrine of the *duo magna orbis luminaria* to which Dante refers in his discussion on the relations between the spiritual and the temporal powers in book 3 of the *Monarchia*.¹⁷ In the same paragraph of this memorandum, Gattinara also quotes the verse from the Gospel of John that Ariosto echoes in canto 15 of the *Orlando furioso*.¹⁸

As a new Hercules and Alexander, Charles's mission was to recover the cities of Constantinople and Jerusalem from the infidels' usurpation in the East, to continue spreading the Lord's message to the Indians in the West,

see also J. A. Fernandez-Santamaria, *The State, War and Peace: Spanish Political Thought in the Renaissance 1516–1559* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11–57.

¹⁵ Desiderius Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, trans. Neil Cheshire and Michael Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), especially 3.

¹⁶ The emblem was devised by the bishop Ludovico Marliano, who was another Italian erudite serving at Charles's court and a friend of Gattinara's. See Paolo Giovio, *Dialogo dell'impresie militari e amorose* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1978), 46–47. Tasso was aware of this insignia, as shown in his dialogue *Il conte overo de l'impresie*: "Poiché mi concedete ch'io trapassi l'ordine, comincerò dal fine, cioè da le colonne di Carlo Quinto, imperadore oltre tutti gli altri gloriosissimo, il quale trapassò tutti i termini della gloria mondana: però a le colonne di Ercole aggiunse questo *plus ultra*" ("Since you permit me to transgress this order, I will begin from the end, that is, from the pillars of Charles V, emperor of utmost glory, who transgressed all boundaries of wordly glory, thereby adding to the pillars of Hercules this *plus ultra*"). Torquato Tasso, *Dialoghi*, ed. Giovanni Baffetti (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998), vol. 2, 1196. Tasso also praises Charles V in *Gerusalemme conquistata* 20. 103–107 and in his *Rime*, in *Opere*, ed. Bruno Maier (Milan: Rizzoli, 1964), vol. 2, 44 and 202–203. On the emblem and on the use of the passage from the Gospel of John, see Luigi Avonto, *Mercurino Arborio di Gattinara: documenti inediti per la storia delle Indie Nuove nell'archivio del gran cancelliere di Carlo V* (Vercelli: S. E. T. C., 1981), 15–17; Karl Brandt, *The Emperor Charles V*, 112–114; John Headley, "The Habsburg World Empire and the Revival of Ghibellinism," 93–95; Frances Yates, *Astrea*, 25–26.

¹⁷ Dante Alighieri, *Monarchia* 3.4.2.

¹⁸ For the 1519 memorandum, see Gattinara's autobiography in Carlo Bornate, ed., *"Historia vitae et gestorum per dominum magnum canellarium"*, con note, aggiunte e documenti, *Miscellanea di storia e italiana* 48 (1915): 233–558, especially 278 and 405–413, which includes the text of the memorandum in the French original. Interestingly, in another document addressed to Charles in 1520, which arguably reflects the influence of Dante's *Monarchia*, Gattinara advises the emperor to respect the local customs and the laws of the various kingdoms under his authority. See Carlo Bornate, *"Historia vitae et gestorum per dominum magnum canellarium"*, con note, aggiunte e documenti, 419.

and to promote unity, justice, and peace on behalf of a divided Christian commonwealth.¹⁹ Among these daunting challenges, the most immediate threat to Charles's dominions came from the Turks led by Suleyman the Magnificent, who in 1529 were laying siege on Vienna. The prevailing attitude towards the Ottomans was shaped after the conquest of Constantinople by Mehmed II in 1453. It continued to exert its influence well into the sixteenth century, affecting the cultural milieu within which Tasso's thought developed and the *Gerusalemme liberata* was conceived.

Islam in the West

The fall of the last bastion of the Eastern Roman Empire and one of the capitals of Christendom sent shockwaves throughout Europe. Even a cursory survey of the chronicles written in the immediate aftermath of this traumatic event seems to manifest the widespread fear and contempt that engulfed most courts in Italy and elsewhere. The tone of these laments ranges from apocalyptic and bellicose to rueful because of the divisions among Christian nations. The clashing interests of the European states hampered all efforts to muster the resources needed to launch a crusade and recover the lands that the Muslims had subjugated. Nevertheless, as the letter that Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini sent to Nicholas V in July 1453 makes plain, the prophet of Islam and his Turkish followers were primarily regarded as the arch enemies of the Christian faith: "Nuncque dum malum est recens Christianae rei publicae consulere festinent, pacem aut indutias inter socios fidei component atque iunctis viribus aversus salutiferae crucis inimicos arma moveant" ("And now while the wound is fresh, the Christian republics ought to hasten to deliberate, to make peace or pacts among their coreligionists, and to wage war collectively against the enemies of the healing cross").²⁰

¹⁹ On the universality of the Church, see Isidore of Seville: "Ecclesia Graecum est, quod in Latinum vertitur convocatio, propter quod omnes ad se vocet. Catholica, universalis, APO TOU KATH OLON, id est secundum totum. Non enim sicut conventicula haereticorum in aliquibus regionum partibus coartatur, sed per totum terrarum orbem dilatata diffunditur" ("Church is a Greek word that is translated into Latin as 'convocation,' because it calls everyone to itself. 'Catholic' is translated as universal, after the term, that is, 'with respect to the whole,' for it is not restricted to some part of a territory, like a small association of heretics, but it is spread widely throughout the entire world"). *Etymologiae* 8.1.1.

²⁰ A large collection of chronicles documenting the fall of Constantinople and its aftermath is available in Agostino Pertusi, ed., *La caduta di Costantinopoli. L'eco nel mondo*

This first impression, however justified by the majority of works produced in the aftermath of 1453, fails to account for the broad spectrum of cultural exchanges between East and West. Within the established, albeit not unanimous, storyline of the Turkish foe, it is possible to make out a wide array of nuances that distinguish the positions endorsed by prominent humanists such as Pius II, Nicholas of Cusa, and, half a century later, Erasmus. Over the last fifteen years, several scholars have fruitfully documented the secular and political facets that define humanists' portraits of the Turks.²¹ As a well-known letter of Pius II to cardinal Nicholas of Cusa makes clear, the fall of Constantinople was also seen as a fatal blow to the classical legacy of ancient Greece: "Mansit usque in hanc diem vetustae sapientiae apud Constantinopolim monumentum, ac velut ibi domicilium litterarum esset... At nunc vincentibus Turchis et omnia possidentibus, quae Graeca potential tenuit, actum esse de litteris Graecis arbitror" ("And so the monument to ancient wisdom has remained at Constantinople to this day, and it is as if the dwellings of letters was there... But now, with the victorious Turks possessing all which Greek potency had achieved, I wonder what will be done about Greek letters").²² While these scholars have correctly underscored a distinguishable shift in the characterization

(Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1976), vol. 2, 44–49. See also volume 4 of Marina Beer, ed., *Guerre in ottava rima* (Modena: Panini, 1988).

²¹ Among the authors who have discussed this transition towards a more secular depiction of the Turks, see Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), who also dedicates a chapter to the religious aspect of the encounters between East and West (see 135–173); James Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Mehmed II," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 49 (1995): 111–207. On the image of the Muslims in Europe, see also Franco Cardini, *L'invenzione del Nemico*, especially 179–185; Richard Fletcher, *The Cross and the Crescent: Christianity and Islam from Muhammad to the Reformation* (New York: Allen Lane—The Penguin Press, 2003), 131–159; Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Oxford: One World, 1993), 302–317; Robert Schwoebel, *The Shadow of the Crescent: The Renaissance Image of the Turk (1453–1517)* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967); Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 160–191; R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 85–109. For an overview of the recent studies on the question of Islam in the Renaissance, see Francesca Trivellato, "Renaissance Italy and the Muslim Mediterranean in Recent Historical Work," *Journal of Modern History* 82 (March 2010): 127–155.

²² For the Latin text, see Agostino Pertusi, ed., *La caduta di Costantinopoli. L'eco nel mondo*, 52. The English translation is from Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II), *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius: Selected Letters of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini*, ed. and trans. Thomas Izbicki, Gerald Christianson, and Philip Krey (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 311.

of the Muslims—and more specifically of the Turks—between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, I would emphasize that the theological components of Renaissance humanist critiques of Islam were for the most part anchored to the same principles and myths formulated during the Middle Ages and that were graphically pictured in Dante's representation of Mohammed as a schismatic in *Inferno* 28.²³

As we can gather from the writings of Pius II, Nicholas of Cusa, and Marsilio Ficino, the theological disagreement between Christians and Muslims pivoted around three widely exploited points: the refusal to believe in the doctrine of the Trinity; the prohibition to question the teachings of the Koran; and the corporeal quality of those teachings. As for Mohammed, he was still regarded as a cunning impostor who had been educated by a renegade monk named Sergius and eventually founded a heretical sect.²⁴ A few examples will help us qualify this characterization. In book 2 of his *Commentaries*, Pius II underlines the influence on the prophet of heresies like Nestorianism and Arianism, which called into question the divine nature of Christ: “Haec gens inimica Trinitatis Mahumetem quendam pseudoprophetam sequitur, qui fuit Arabs gentili errore et Iudaica imbutus perfidia audivitque Christianos, qui Nestoriana et Ariana labe infecti errant” (“The Turkish nation despises the Trinity. They follow a certain false prophet called Muhammad, an Arab steeped in gentile error and Jewish perfidy, who received instruction in the Nestorian and Arian

²³ *Inferno* 28.22–63. On Dante's portrait of Mohammed, see Rasha Al Sabah, “*Inferno* XXVIII: The Figure of Muhammad,” *Yale Italian Studies* I (Winter 1977): 147–161; Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 75–95; Brenda Deen Schildgen, *Dante and the Orient* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 55–61; and two essays in the issue of *Dante Studies* entirely dedicated to Dante and Islam: Maria Esposito Frank, “Dante's Muhammad: Parallels between Islam and Arianism,” *Dante Studies* 125 (2007): 185–206; and Karla Mallette, “Muhammad in Hell,” 207–224.

²⁴ As Nicholas of Cusa writes in the *Cribatio Alkorani*, “Videtur igitur, quod Mahumetus ab initio fundatus fuit per Sergium, ut esset Christianus et legem illam servaret” (“It seems, then, that at the beginning Muhammad was firmly grounded by Sergius, so that he was a Christian and observed the Christian law”). *Cribatio Alkorani* 12.1–2 in Nicholas of Cusa, *Opera omnia* (Hamburg: Felix Meier, 1932–2010), vol. 8, 14. All English translations are from Jasper Hopkins, ed. and trans., *Nicholas of Cusa's De Pace Fidei and Cribatio Alkorani* (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1994), 79. Cf. Marsilio Ficino, who, in a letter to King Matthias of Hungary penned in 1480 and entitled *Exhortatio ad bellum contra barbaros*, describes the Turks as “savage beasts” and “inhuman.” Marsilio Ficino, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, translated by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1975–1999), vol. 2, 4. See also Marsilio Ficino, *De Christiana Religione*, in *Opera omnia* (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1959), 47 and 102–105.

heresies").²⁵ About seven years after the fall of Constantinople, Nicholas of Cusa wrote the *Cribatio Alkorani*, in which he sought to dismantle the teachings of the Koran through logical arguments. In the dedicatory preface to Pius II, we find a familiar polemical note against the "Muhammadan sect":

Sume, sanctissime papa, labellum hunc per humilem servulum tuum fidei zelo collectum, ut, dum more ter sancti Leonis papae praedecessoris tui Nestorianam haeresim apostolico spiritu, angelico ingenio divinoque eloquio damnantis tu Mahumetanam sectam de illa exortam eodem spiritu, pari ingenio facundiaque aequali erroneam eliminandamque ostendes, cito quaedam rudimenta sciru necessaria ad manu habeas.²⁶

On the one hand, Nicholas of Cusa's scrutiny of the Koran retains many of the polemical arguments used during the Middle Ages; on the other, the German theologian shows an extraordinary interest in furthering his understanding of Islam and of the Koran, as the rest of the prologue to the *Cribatio* meticulously shows.²⁷

Parallel to this wave of polemical writings, other works—some by the same authors already mentioned—reveal a more conciliatory tone. For instance, Cusa's eager curiosity was partly aimed at finding a reasonable common ground to mitigate the most radical contentions between faiths. In his earlier dialogue *De pace fidei* (1453), the conversation among the various speakers culminates with the following appeal for tolerance and peace: "permittantur nationes—salva fide et pace—in suis devotionibus et cerimonialibus" ("nations are entitled to their own devotions and ceremonies, provided faith and peace be maintained").²⁸

²⁵ Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II), *Commentaries*, ed. and trans. Margaert Meserve and Marcello Simonetta (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), vol. 1, 211 (book 2, chapter 1).

²⁶ Nicholas of Cusa, *Opera omnia*, vol. 8, 3. "O, most holy Pope, accept this book composed with zealous faith by your humble servant. Accept it so that when in the manner of threefold holy Pope Leo, your predecessor, who with angelic genius and eloquence condemned the Nestorian heresy through his apostolic spirit—you show through the same spirit, and with equal genius and eloquence, that the Muhammadan sect (which has arisen from this heresy), is in error and is to be repudiated." Jasper Hopkins, ed., *Nicholas of Cusa's De Pace Fidei and Cribatio Alkorani*, 75.

²⁷ In the last paragraph of the prologue, Cusa even notes that the Koranic verses were beautifully written in order to charm its readers. See Nicholas of Cusa, *Opera omnia*, vol. 8, 17; Jasper Hopkins, ed., *Nicholas of Cusa's De Pace Fidei and Cribatio Alkorani*, 81.

²⁸ Nicholas of Cusa, *Opera omnia*, vol. 7, 62; Jasper Hopkins, ed., *Nicholas of Cusa's De Pace Fidei and Cribatio Alkorani*, 69. See also the last paragraph of the *De pace fidei*, where Cusa states: "Et mandatum est per Regem regum ut sapientes redeant et ad unitatem veram cultus nationes inducant, et quod amdinistratorii spiritus illos ducant et eis assistant et

Even more striking is the degree of admiration for the young Sultan and for his fondness of philosophy and history. In 1454 Nicola Sagundino, a diplomat at the service of the Venetian republic who witnessed the fall of Constantinople, wrote an oration to Alfonso V of Aragon, in which he sketched a mixed portrait of Mehmed II. The young Ottoman ruler is described as an intelligent and melancholic man who, while cruelly prone to wage war against Christianity, also reveals uncommon integrity.²⁹ Most importantly, Sagundino reported Mehmed's interest in ancient history, particularly in the figures of Caesar and Alexander the Great. It is not at all surprising, then, that Sagundino indicated that Mehmed aspired to claim "imperium orbis" and to take over the city of Rome as the righteous seat of his reign: "ait sibi concedi coelitus Constantini sedem, hanc vero Romam esse, non Constantinopolim videri" ("he said that the seat of Constantine is bestowed from heaven and that this seat seems to be Rome, not Constantinople").³⁰

Two years later, Sagundino would present an expanded version of this text to Pius II who, in his famous *Epistle to Mohammed II* (ca. 1460), articulated a comparison between Islamic and Christian doctrines apparently aimed at converting the Sultan. The extensive use of arguments similar to those deployed by Cusa in the *Cribatio Alkorani* and Pius's rhetorical flourish hardly mask the pope's frustration and disillusionment with the fractiousness among European nations, which utterly mired his efforts to launch a crusade. Although he begins addressing the Prince of the Turks as "nostrae religionis hostis" ("an enemy of our religion"),³¹ Pius II offers a somewhat shocking proposal to the recipient of his message:

Si vis inter Christianos tuum imperium propagare et nomen tuum quam gloriosum efficere, non auro, non armis, non exercitibus, non classibus opus est. Parva res omnium qui hodie vivunt maximum et potentissimum et clarissimum te reddere potest... id est aquae pauxillum, quo baptizeris et ad

deinde cum plena omnium potestate in Iherusalem quasi ad centrum commune confluent et omnium nominibus unam fidem acceptant et super ipsa perpetuam pacem firment, ut in pace creator omnium laudetur in saecula benedictus" ("[God] commanded that thereafter these wise men, having full power to speak for all in their respective nations, assemble in Jerusalem, as being a common center, and in the names of all their countrymen accept a single faith and establish a perpetual peace with respect thereto, so that the Creator of all, who is blessed forever, may be praised in peace"). Nicholas of Cusa, *Opera omnia*, vol. 7, 63; Jasper Hopkins, ed., *Nicholas of Cusa's De Pace Fidei and Cribatio Alkorani*, 70–71.

²⁹ See Agostino Pertusi, ed., *La caduta di Costantinopoli. L'eco nel mondo*, vol. 2, 130–133.

³⁰ Agostino Pertusi, ed., *La caduta di Costantinopoli. L'eco nel mondo*, vol. 2, 133.

³¹ Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II), *Epistola ad Mahometem II* (*Epistle to Mohammed II*), ed. and trans. Albert Baca (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 115 [11].

Christianorum sacra te conferas et credas Evangelio. Haec si feceris, non erit in orbe princeps qui te Gloria superset aut aequare potential valeat. Nos te Graecorum et Orientis imperatorem appellabimus et quod modo vi occupas et cum iniuria tenes possidebis iure.³²

According to Pius, the only flaw that keeps Mehmed from legitimately exercising his authority would be his faith. Neither his often disparaged ethnic identity, nor the form of his government makes the Turkish sovereign unfit to rule over the Christian commonwealth. The rejection of Mehmed's conquests lies on purely theological grounds. A "little bit of water" would turn this ruthless foe into "the greatest, most powerful and illustrious man of all who live today." Should the passage above have left some readers indifferent, Pius II reinforced his point drawing a parallel with none other than Augustus and echoing Virgil's fourth *Eclogue* and the book of Isaiah:

O quanta esset abundantia pacis, quanta Christianae plebis exultatio, quanta iubilatio in omni terra: redirent Augusti tempora et quae poetae vocant aurea saecula renovarentur! Habiteret pardus cum agno et vitulus cum leone; gladii verterentur in falces, in vomeres ac ligones... O quanta esset tua Gloria, qui pacem orbi reddidisses!³³

Even if it is difficult to know how sincerely the great humanist pope made such claims and what his goals were in crafting such a provocative suggestion,³⁴ it is certain that Pius's letter had a widespread circulation

³² "If you want to extend your power over Christians and render your name as glorious as possible, you do not need gold, weapons, armies, or fleet. A little thing can make you the greatest, most powerful and illustrious man of all who live today... it is a little bit of water by which you may be baptized and brought to Christian rites and to the belief in the Gospel. If you receive this, there will not be any leader in the world who can surpass you in glory or equal you in power. We will call you ruler over the Greeks and the East; what you now hold by force and injustice, you will rightfully possess." Ibid., 121–22 [17–18].

³³ "O how great would the abundance of peace be, how great the exultation of Christian folk, how great the joy in the whole world! The Augustan era and the Golden Age of the poets would be renewed! The leopard would lie down with the kid and the calf with the lion; swords would be beaten into pruning hooks, plowshares, and hoes... O how great would be your glory for being the one who restored peace to the world!" Ibid., 123 [19]. Cf. Isaiah 2: 4 and 11: 6.

³⁴ As Hankins suggests, it is possible that Pius II wanted the document to be leaked to the court of the emperor Frederick III, and possibly to courts of other European rulers, to support his plans to launch a crusade. See James Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Mehmed II," 130. It must be noted that Mehmed II was a well-respected figure in some European centers of power. Especially significant is the case of Florence, where the Medici had cultivated a fruitful relationship with the Ottoman ruler. Two of the most overt signs of this friendship followed the extradition of one of the Pazzi conspirators, Bernardo Bandini, who had escaped to Constantinople after the

in Western Europe. Positing that, through baptism, the Turkish emperor could bring peace to the world radically subverted the perspective from which the idea of universal monarchy was usually looked at and showed how imperial rhetoric could cut both ways,³⁵ as we shall see in Satan's speech in canto 4 of the *Gerusalemme liberata*. Drawing such attention to the power of conversion, Pius II emphasized two themes that would emerge in Tasso's work: first, the view that the line between enemies and friends can be easily blurred; second, the belief that politics alone may not overcome religious conflicts and achieve lasting peace.

The issues discussed by the likes of Pius II and Cusanus were still at the center of sixteenth century intellectual debates. Erasmus, who rejected the idea of the crusade in the *Education of a Christian Prince* (1516) and in the *Complaint of Peace* (1517), challenged some of the assumptions that characterized Europe's representations of Islam. His skepticism originated from the belief that "bellum gignat bellum" ("war breeds war") and that, rather than confronting the Turkish menace with violence, Europeans should first address their own shortcomings: "Primum hoc agamus ut ipsi simus germane Christiani, deinde si uisum erit, Turcas adoriamur" ("first make sure that we are truly Christians ourselves and then, if it seems appropriate, let us attack the Turks").³⁶ However, since the advance of the

tragic events of 1478. To express his gratitude for this gesture, Lorenzo de' Medici had a Florentine sculptor, Bertoldo di Giovanni, craft a medallion for Mehmed II. Furthermore, in 1482, barely a year after the brief occupation of Otranto by the Turks, Francesco Berlinghieri dedicated one of the copies of his translation of Ptolemy's *Geographia* to the Sultan. It would seem particularly appropriate to offer a book that seeks to represent the world to a ruler who cultivated a globally imperial rhetoric. Yet, since Mehmed II died while the volume was being completed, it was eventually addressed to his son Beyazid II. On the relationship between the Medici regime and the Turkish emperor, see Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, 131 (on Ficino's letters to pope Sixtus IV and King Matthias); Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks*, especially 74–75 116–117; James Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Mehmed II," 124–127; Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and his Time*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 384–387 and 503–507; Robert Schwoebel, *The Shadow of the Crescent: The Renaissance Image of the Turk (1453–1517)*, 161–165; and Franz Babinger, "Lorenzo de' Medici e la corte ottomana," *Archivio storico italiano* 121 (1963): 305–361.

³⁵ A similar view is expressed by Francesco Filelfo, who praised the Sultan in a Greek ode written in 1454, offering his service if the Turkish sovereign decided to convert. Filelfo also states that if Mehmed became a Christian, he would rule over the entire world. See Agostino Pertusi, ed., *Testi inediti e poco conosciuti sulla caduta di Costantinopoli* (Bologna: Patron Editore, 1983), 264–269.

³⁶ Desiderius Erasmus, *Institutio Principis Christiani*, in *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Werner Welzig (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), 348 and 354. The English translations are from Desiderius Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, 103

Turks in the Balkans showed no signs of stopping, in 1529 Charles V had to face the Ottoman siege of Vienna; therefore, even Erasmus was forced to endorse the defensive war against the Turks in the *Utilissima consultatio de bello Turcis inferendo* (1530).³⁷

An apparent backing of the crusades came from another protagonist of the intellectual and political life of the sixteenth century, Baldassarre Castiglione.³⁸ In an ambivalent discourse on Alexander the Great's vast empire in book 4 of Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (1528),³⁹ one of the participants in the dialogue, Ottaviano, shifts his focus from antiquity to modernity and indicates that, as the Macedonian king did in his campaign throughout Asia, so should the European princes wage a war to civilize the Muslims and finally defeat the Saracen sect, turning "many thousands of men from the false sect of Mohammed to the light of Christian truth":

E di coloro che voi avete nominati, non vi par che Alessandro giovasse con le sue vittorie ai vinti, avendo instituite di tanti boni costumi quelle barbare genti che superò, che di fiere gli fece omini? Edificò tante belle città in paesi mal abitati, introducendovi il viver morale; e quasi congiungendo l'Asia e l'Europa col vincolo dell'amicizia e delle sante leggi, di modo che più felici furno i vinti da lui, che gli altri... Ma lassando gli antichi, qual più nobile e gloriosa impresa e più giovevole potrebbe essere, che se i Cristiani voltassero le forze loro a subiugare gli infedeli? non vi parrebbe che questa Guerra, succedendo prosperamente ed essendo causa di ridurre dalla falsa setta di Maumet al lume della verità cristiana tante migliaia di uomini, fosse per giovare così ai vinti come ai vincitori?⁴⁰

and 109. Erasmus also notes that, given the history of Christianity's expansion, Christians should not rush into war against the Turks: "Ego nec in Turcas bellum temere suscipiendum essecenseo, primum illud mecum reputans, Christi ditionem longe diuersa uia natam, propagatam, et constabilitam" ("war against the Turks should be hastily undertaken, remembering first of all that the kingdom of Christ was created, spread, and secured by very different means"). Desiderius Erasmus, *Institutio Principis Christiani*, 352 [108]. This line of argument would eventually be employed by Bartolomé de Las Casas when he argued against the forceful conversion of the Indians. See also Desiderius Erasmus, *The Complaint of Peace*, in *The Praise of Folly and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Robert Adams (New York: Norton & Company, 1989), 105.

³⁷ Desiderius Erasmus, *A Most Useful Discussion Concerning Proposals for War against the Turks*, trans. Michael Heath, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 64, 201–266.

³⁸ Tasso praises Castiglione for his military and literary merits in one of his poems; see Torquato Tasso, *Opere*, ed. Bruno Maier (Milan: Rizzoli, 1964), vol. 2, 261–262.

³⁹ *Il Libro del Cortegiano* was first published in 1528, after a revision process lasted more than fifteen years. On Castiglione's work, see Amedeo Quondam, *Questo povero Cortegiano. Castiglione, il Libro, la Storia* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 2000).

⁴⁰ *Il Cortegiano* 4.37–38. Baldassarre Castiglione, *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (Milan: Garzanti, 2000), 408–409. "And, as among those whom you named, do you not think that by his victories Alexander did good to those whom he overcame, having taught so many good

This passage underscores how Alexander's endeavors contributed to drawing the boundaries of the ancient world and to shape the relationship between East and West. His conquests provided those who endorsed the conversion of the infidels with a classical and authoritative model. It is particularly significant that Ottaviano uses the phrase "ridurre dalla falsa setta di Maumet" to define the crusade's objective as the repression of a renegade faction.

Although Castiglione does not mention the recent geographical discoveries, the notion that it would be possible to spread religious and social values into a "barbaric" culture through warfare would implicitly apply not only to the Muslim nations in Asia and Africa, but also to the American Indians. One of the most relentless advocates of this ideology was the Spanish theologian and humanist Juan Gines de Sepulveda. After studying in Bologna with Pietro Pomponazzi, he entered the service of the papal curia, where he stayed until 1536, the year in which he became the official chronicler of Charles V. As the *Exhortación a la guerra contra los Turcos* (published in Bologna in 1529) makes plain, the spirit of Sepulveda's appeal to the Emperor is unequivocal. He portrayed the Turks as an imminent threat to the entire *respublica christiana* and retrieved some of the conventional ingredients of anti-Muslim invectives. The enemies are described as "feroces barbaros" who despise the liberal arts.⁴¹ While the primary target of Sepulveda's attacks were the Turks, he also condemned those Christians who were not in favor of the campaign against the Muslims, revealing the lingering discord among the European states, even when the Turkish menace could hardly have loomed any closer to the center of the Catholic Church. Among this cohort of "internal" enemies, Sepulveda included those who argued that "no es propio de la tolerancia

customs to those barbarous people whom he conquered, from wild beasts making them men? He built so many cities in lands that were sparsely populated, introducing there a decent way of life and, as it were, uniting Asia and Europe by the bond of friendship and holy laws, so that those who were conquered by him were happier than the others... But, leaving aside the ancients, what more noble, glorious, and profitable undertaking could there be than for Christians to direct their efforts to subjugating the infidels? To you that such a war, if it should meet with good success and were the means of turning so many thousands of men from the false sect of Mohammed to the light of the Christian truth, would be as profitable to the vanquished as to the victors?" The English translation is from Baldassarre Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, ed. Daniel Javitch, trans. Charles Singleton (New York: Norton, 2002), 233. On Castiglione's support for the crusade, see Amedeo Quondam, "Questo povero Cortegiano. Castiglione, il Libro, la Storia, 392–394 and 497–500.

⁴¹ Juan Gines de Sepulveda, *Exhortación a la guerra contra los Turcos*, in *Tratados políticos de Juan Gines de Sepulveda* ed. Angel Losada (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 1963), 3–27, especially 4–7.

cristiana el oponerse con la espada y las armas a la violencia de los turcos" ("it does not pertain to Christian tolerance to oppose the violence of the Turks with the sword and with arms"). These arguments are described as "opiniones heréticas" and their authors as "funesto y capital enemigo[s] de la Religión Cristiana" ("mortal and deadly enemies of the Christian religion").⁴² In condemning these "sacrilegious" views, Sepulveda probably had in mind Luther's (initial) justification of the Turkish invasion⁴³ and Erasmus's reluctance to support a military response. Only a few months after the publication of Sepulveda's pamphlet, the Dutch humanist tepidly endorsed the campaign to fight the Ottomans.

In the final pages of the *Exhortación*, Sepulveda urged Charles V to rescue the territories occupied by the Muslims, including Constantinople and Jerusalem, two cities that he describes as "corte en otro tiempo de Emperadores romanos" ("the seat in another time of Roman emperors") and "principal sagrario de la Religión Cristiana" ("the principle sacristy of the Christian religion"). Thanks to these endeavors, continues Sepulveda, "bajo tu imperio y dirección de la guerra, el resto del mundo se una al dominio de los cristianos y a su santissima Religión" ("under your rule and military leadership, the rest of the world will submit to the authority of Christians and to their most holy religion").⁴⁴ As I will discuss below, Sepulveda employed the same notions of just war to legitimize the occupation of the West Indies and the forced conversion of its inhabitants. The parallels between the mission to recover the Holy Land and the voyage westward on the way to the East, which arguably informed Christopher Columbus's theological horizon and Tasso's "geography of the enemy," were not of concern to Sepulveda alone. In fact it would have been the one point of agreement with his rival, Bartolomé de Las Casas, had the latter not used the example of the Muslims in antithesis to the harmless populations of the New World.⁴⁵

⁴² Juan Gines de Sepulveda, *Exhortación a la guerra contra los Turcos*, 10 and 16.

⁴³ For the shift of Luther's stance on the war against the Turks in relation to the persistence of his anti-papal polemics and, on the other hand, to his support for Charles V, see Martin Luther, *On War against the Turk*, in *Selected Political Writings*, ed. J. M. Porter (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 121–131.

⁴⁴ Juan Gines de Sepulveda, *Exhortación a la guerra contra los Turcos*, 26–27.

⁴⁵ See chapter 27 of Las Casas's *Apología*: "Quintus casus in quo Ecclesia potest in actum deducere jurisdictionem, quam super infideles habet tantum habitu, est cum infideles bellico apparatus in provincias nostras irrumpunt vel litora nostra infestant . . . , ut Turcae christianitatem molestant" ("The fifth case in which the Church can actualize the potential jurisdiction it has over unbelievers is when unbelievers break into our provinces or harass our shores with the accouterments of war . . . , as in the case of the Turks").

Buscar el Levante por el Poniente

In the prologue to his *Diario del Primer Viaje*, Christopher Columbus writes:

Y Vuestras Altezas, como cathólicos cristianos y príncipes amadores de la sancta fe cristiana y acreçentadores d'ella y enemigos de la secta de Mahoma y de todas idolatrías y heregías, pensaron de enbriarme a mí, Cristóval Colón, a las sichas partidas de India para aver los dichos príncipes y los pueblos y las tierras y la disposición d'ellas y de todo, y la manera que se pudiera tener para la conversión d'ellas a nuestra sancta fe, y ordenaron que yo no fuese por tierra al oriente, por donde se costumbra de andar, salvo por el camino de Occidente.⁴⁶

Columbus highlights the role of the Spanish sovereigns as defenders of Christianity against the Moors, who were expelled from Spain in 1492, and

Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Apología. O Declaración Defensa Universal de los Derechos del Hombre y de los Pueblos* (Castilla y Leon: Consejería de Educación y Cultura, 2000), 179. All English translations of the *Apología* are from Bartolomé de Las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians*, ed. and trans. S. Poole (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992), 183–184. On the overlapping of the representations of the Indians and of the Moors, see Barbara Fuchs, *Mimesis and Empire: The New World, Islam, and European Identities*, 1–8 and 72–78; and Stephen Clissold, *Conquistador: The Life of Don Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa* (London: Derek Verschoyle, 1956), 62–65, which relate the description of a mock-battle organized in honor of the Viceroy of Peru, Francisco de Toledo, in which the Indians were cast as the Moors, while the Spaniards obviously played themselves.

⁴⁶ Cristóbal Colón, *Textos y documentos completos. Relaciones de viajes, cartas y memoriales*, ed. Consuelo Varela (Madrid: Alianza, 1982), 15–16. “[A]nd Your Highnesses, as Catholic Christians and as princes as devoted to the holy Christian faith and propagators thereof, and enemies of the sect of Mahomet and of all idolatries and heresies took thought to send me, Christopher Columbus, to the said part of India, to see those princes and peoples and lands and the character of them and of all else, and the manner which should be used to bring about their conversion to our holy faith, and ordained that I should not go by land to the eastward, by which way it was the custom to go, but by way of the west.” The English translation is from Christopher Columbus, *The Journal of Christopher Columbus*, trans. Cecil Jane (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1960), 4. Among the countless studies published on the subject of Columbus’s “discovery” and its aftermath, see Erin McCarthy-King’s and Giuseppe Mazzotta’s essays in this volume; Nicolás Wey Gómez, *The Tropics of Empire: Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); David Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008); Theodore J. Cachey, “Between Humanism and New Historicism: Rewriting the New World Encounter,” *Annali d’Italianistica* 10 (1992): 28–46; Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. R. Howard (New York: Harper & Row, 1984); Fredi Chiappelli, ed., *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976); Rosario Romeo, *Le scoperte americane nella coscienza italiana del Cinquecento* (Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1954).

all other heretical threats. His voyage through an uncharted route is thus framed within a broader fight for the unity and the expansion of the Catholic faith. Hence, when Columbus decided to sail westward beyond the pillars of Hercules, he hoped to reach the East not only in a strictly geographical sense; he also sought to fulfill a providential duty that ensued from a religious vision in which each individual perspective is integrated within a comprehensive, unified, worldview.

As a fervent Catholic and as a keen interpreter of his own name, the Genoese admiral famously saw himself as the bearer of Christ, *Christum ferens*.⁴⁷ In addition to his effort to spread the message of the Gospel throughout the earth, in his four journeys to the West Indies, Columbus aimed to find enough gold to help fund a crusade and recover Jerusalem:

Y [Columbus] dize qu'espera en Dios que, a la buelta que él entendía hazer de Castilla, avía de hallar un tonel de oro que avrín resgatado los que avía de dexar, y que avrían hallado la mina de oro y la espeçeria, y aquello en tanta cantidad que los Reyes antes de tres años emprendiesen y adereçasen para ir a conquistar la Casa Sancta [Jerusalem].⁴⁸

While his objective to reach India turned out to be a miscalculation of global proportions and his dream that the Holy Land would be recovered never materialized, he certainly succeeded in spearheading the colonization of the new continent and one of the largest transfers of goods,

⁴⁷ In the first chapter of his *Historie*, published for the first time in Venice in 1571, Christopher Columbus's son, Ferdinand, pushes the interpretation of his father's name even further. Whereas the Italian version, Colombo, refers to the dove, which symbolizes the Holy Spirit, the Spanish Colón, which derives from the Latin word *colonus*, means "settler." See Ferdinand Columbus, *Historie Concerning the Life and Deeds of the Admiral Don Christopher Columbus*, ed. and trans. Luciano Farina (Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1998), vol. 1, 20–21. See also Nigel Griffin, ed., *Las Casas on Columbus: Background and the Second and Fourth Voyage*, trans. Nigel Griffin (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 24–25.

⁴⁸ Cristóbal Colón, *Textos y documentos completos. Relaciones de viajes, cartas y memorials*, 101. "And he says he trusts God that on his return, which he intended to make from Castile, he would find a barrel of gold, which those whom he had left there should have obtained by barter, and they would have found the gold mine and the spices, and in such quantity, that the Sovereigns, within three years, would undertake and prepare to go to the conquest of the Holy Places." Christopher Columbus, *The Journal of Christopher Columbus*, 128. On Columbus's understanding of his mission in biblical and eschatological terms, see also Christopher Columbus, *The Book of Prophecies Edited by Christopher Columbus*. Although the *Libro de las Prophecías* was probably compiled in 1501–1502, it was not printed until 1892. Cf. Nigel Griffin, ed., *Las Casas on Columbus: Background and the Second and Fourth Voyage*, 26. On the relationship between Columbus's journey and the struggle against the Muslims, see Taviani's and Caraci's commentary in Ferdinand Columbus, *Historie Concerning the Life and Deeds of the Admiral Don Christopher Columbus*, vol. 2, 185–191.

peoples, and beliefs in the history of humankind. Together with an unflinching confidence in his mission, Columbus was armed with a vast navigational experience and with scientific knowledge acquired through the writings of Italian humanists, especially the Florentine astronomer and physician Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli.⁴⁹

Although the editorial history of Columbus's *Journal* is rather murky and the extant document, which was one of the sources of Las Casas's *Historia de las Indias* (ca. 1559), was not published in Italy until the nineteenth century, news of the Admiral's triumph had soon begun to circulate throughout Europe.⁵⁰ By the time Tasso began drafting the poem that would eventually become the *Gerusalemme liberata*, Columbus and his endeavors had been popularized by the reports of various Italian ambassadors in Spain and the works of various historians. Among these were Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, author of the *De Orbe Novo Decades* and friend of Columbus and Mercurino di Gattinara, and Giovan Battista Ramusio, who collected a variety of travel books in three hefty volumes published in Venice in 1556. Thanks to these works, the accounts of Columbus's

⁴⁹ Among the numerous studies on Columbus's epistolary exchange with Toscanelli and, more broadly, on the influence exerted by the Florentine humanist, see Gustavo Uzielli, *Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli iniziatore della scoperta d'America* (Florence: Stabilimento Tipografico Fiorentino, 1892), 73–96 and 170–176; and Taviani's and Caraci's commentary in Ferdinand Columbus, *Historie Concerning the Life and Deeds of the Admiral Don Christopher Columbus*, vol. 2, 299–305. On Columbus's education, see Anthony Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 75–93; and Giuseppe Mazzotta's essay in this volume. On the large collection of books on geography in the Medici library, see Sebastiano Gentile, ed., *Firenze e la scoperta dell'America. Umanesimo e geografia nel '400 Fiorentino* (Florence: Olschki editore, 1992). In the *Historie*, Ferdinand Columbus exaggerates his father's familiarity with the *studia humanitatis*, asserting that the Admiral had attended the University of Pavia. See Ferdinand Columbus, *Historie Concerning the Life and Deeds of the Admiral Don Christopher Columbus*, vol. 1, 26–27 and, on the correspondence with Toscanelli, 38–43. See also Nigel Griffin, ed., *Las Casas on Columbus: Background and the Second and Fourth Voyage*, 32–37. See also Ercole d'Este's epistle to his ambassador in Florence in Geoffrey Symcox, ed., *Italian Reports on America 1493–1522: Letters, Dispatches, and Papal Bulls* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 46, in which the Duke of Ferrara requests some of Toscanelli's notes on geographical matters.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Giacomo Trotti's dispatch from Barcelona, where he served as an envoy for the Este family, to Duke Ercole in March 1493: "Dicto Collomba è retornato in dreto et ha preso terra in Lisbona et ha scripto questo a questo Signore Re, et dicto Signore Re gli ha scripto che subito venga qua: io credo averò copia de la littera quale epso ha scripto et ve la manderò" ("The said Columbus returned at once and made landfall at Lisbon and wrote this to the king, and the said lord king wrote him to come here at once: I believe that I will get a copy of the letter which he wrote, and I will send it to you"). Geoffrey Symcox, ed., *Italian Reports on America 1493–1522: Letters, Dispatches, and Papal Bulls*, 92 and 28.

journeys had become exceedingly popular, as had those of numerous other travelers like Vespucci, Vasco de Gama, and Magellan.⁵¹

The modes of representation that these authors employed to describe the indigenous populations of the West Indies are noteworthy. Their stereotypical portraits ranged from the timid and naïve savage to the monstrous and belligerent cannibal. These traits, already sketched by Columbus in his *Journal*, would remain largely unaltered during the following decades. Upon their arrival, the Admiral and his men sighted men and women who “go naked as their mothers bore them” (“andan todos desnudos como su madre los parió”), who seemed to be “good servants and of quick intelligence” (“buenos servidores y de buen ingenio”), and “do not bear arms or know them” (“no traen armas ni las cognosçen”). Most importantly, Columbus thinks that “they would easily be made Christians” (“ligeramente se harían cristianos”).⁵² At the same time, other clans of Indians embodied the classical image of the anthropophagi: “Entendió también que lexos de allí avía hombres de un ojo y otros con hoçicos de perros que comían los hombres, y que en tomando uno lo degollavan y le bevían la sangre y le cortavan su natura” (“He also understood that far from there were men with one eye, and others with dogs’ noses who ate men, and that when they took a man, they cut off his head and drank his blood and castrated him”).⁵³ The dehumanization of the Indians and the overstatement

⁵¹ Cf. Pietro Martire d’Anghiera, *De Orbe Novo Decades* (Genoa: Dipartimento di Archeologia, Filologia classica e loro tradizioni, 2005); Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Navigazioni e viaggi*, ed. M. Milanese (Turin: Einaudi, 1978–1988); Geoffrey Symcox, ed., *Italian Reports on America 1493–1522: Letters, Dispatches, and Papal Bulls*; Geoffrey Symcox, ed., *Italian Reports on America 1493–1522: Accounts by Contemporary Observers* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002); Antonio Pigafetta, *The First Voyage around the World 1519–1522: An Account of Magellan’s Expedition*, ed. Theodore J. Cachey (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Amerigo Vespucci, *Il mondo nuovo di Amerigo Vespucci*, ed. Mario Pozzi (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 1993).

⁵² Cristóbal Colón, *Textos y documentos completos. Relaciones de viajes, cartas y memoriales*, 30–31; Christopher Columbus, *The Journal of Christopher Columbus*, 23–24. On the Indians as good savages, inhabitants of a golden age, see Pietro Martire d’Anghiera, *De Orbe Novo Decades*, vol. 1, 95. Cf. Francesco Guicciardini, *Storia d’Italia* (Milan: Garzanti, 2006), vol. 1, 643, who in book 6 of his *Storia d’Italia* notes that, with the exception of few very fierce groups who feed on human flesh, the Indians live happily thanks to the fertility of their land, but are vulnerable to foreign threats because they lack any military skills.

⁵³ Cristóbal Colón, *Textos y documentos completos. Relaciones de viajes, cartas y memoriales*, 51; Christopher Columbus, *The Journal of Christopher Columbus*, 52. See also the characterization of the Indians’ cannibalism in Vespucci’s letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici (1502) in Amerigo Vespucci, *Il mondo nuovo di Amerigo Vespucci*, 87–89, and 115–117 and 167–168; Gaspare Contarini’s report from Valladolid to the Doge of Venice (1522) in Geoffrey Symcox, ed., *Italian Reports on America 1493–1522: Letters, Dispatches, and Papal Bulls*, 84–87; and Michele da Cuneo, “News of the Islands of the Hesperian Ocean

of their most atrocious practices would become pivotal arguments in support of the colonization that followed Columbus's first encounters. Echoes of the polemics about the cannibalistic habits of some Indians are present in canto 15 of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*. In the same years, these behaviors also became the topic of a famously "relativistic" essay by Montaigne, *Les Cannibales* (1578–1580), in which the French philosopher questioned whether a custom as horrific to the sensibility of Europeans as anthropophagy could truly qualify as a sign of barbarism.⁵⁴

Whether welcoming or hostile, both categories of the indigenous population lacked knowledge of Christ's message. The pervasive rhetoric of conversion patently highlights the politico-theological reverberations of the discoveries and the subsequent conquests. Because of this rhetoric, numerous fundamental questions lingered: were the Indians fully human? If so, why had so many of Adam's children been deprived of the truth Christians found in the Gospel and how could they be converted? Did they have the right to govern themselves? Although a discussion of these issues lies beyond the scope of this essay, a basic summary of their implications will help us understand the framework within which Tasso's vision of empire and his reference to Columbus's journey in the *Gerusalemme liberata* took shape.

Shortly after the news of Columbus's discovery reached the shores of Europe, Pope Alexander VI, the Spaniard Rodrigo Borgia, issued two bulls, *Eximie devotionis* and *Inter cetera*, in which he assigned all the lands of the West Indies to the kingdom of Spain: "hodie siquidem omnes et singulas terras firmas et insulas remotas et incognitas versus partes occidentals et mare Oceanum consistentes . . . vobis heredibusque et successoribus vestris, Castelle et Legionis regibus, in perpetuum . . . donavimus concessimus et assignavimus" ("today we have given to you [king Ferdinand and queen Isabella] and your heirs and successors as kings of Castile and León all distant and unknown mainlands and islands existing to the west in the Ocean Sea"),⁵⁵ recommending that the Catholic monarchs "ad terras et insulas predictas viros probos et Deum timentes, doctos peritos et expertos ad instruendum incolas et habitatores prefatos in fide catholica et bonis

Discovered by Don Christopher Columbus of Genoa," in Geoffrey Symcox, ed., *Italian Reports on America 1493–1522: Accounts by Contemporary Observers*, 50–63.

⁵⁴ See Michel de Montaigne, *Of Cannibals*, in *The Complete Works*, trans. Donald Frame (New York: Everyman Library, 2003), 182–193.

⁵⁵ Alexander VI, *Eximie devotionis*, in Geoffrey Symcox, ed., *Italian Reports on America 1493–1522: Letters, Dispatches, and Papal Bulls*, 30–31 and 93–94.

moribus imbuendum, destinare debeatis" ("should send to the said lands and islands prudent and God-fearing men, learned, skilled, and proven, to instruct the said natives and inhabitants in the Catholic faith and to instill good morals in them").⁵⁶ The legal tenets of Alexander VI's bulls can be traced back to the medieval understanding of the Catholic Church's universal authority. Points of reference can be recognized in texts such as Boniface VIII's *Unam sanctam* and in Giles of Rome's *De ecclesiastica potestate*, both of which were published in the year 1302.⁵⁷ Even if the geographical discoveries of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were at least in part triggered by the cultural impulses of Italian humanism and were indeed crucial in shaping the modern global order, the formal recognition of the Spaniards' right to conquer the newly discovered lands hinged on a theocratic principle elaborated during the Middle Ages. Unsurprisingly, controversy arose regarding the interpretation of Alexander VI's bulls and the legitimacy of the Spanish colonization of America during the following century, calling into question the core of that very principle.

With Charles V's empire in the background, among the many intellectuals who addressed these problems, two Spanish theologians, Juan Gines de Sepulveda and the first Bishop of Chiapas Bartolomé de Las Casas, were particularly engaged with issues related to the conquests.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Alexander VI, *Inter cetera*, in Geoffrey Symcox, ed., *Italian Reports on America 1493–1522: Letters, Dispatches, and Papal Bulls*, 31–34 and 95–97 for the Latin text.

⁵⁷ In chapter 6 of book 2 of the *De ecclesiastica potestate*, which was dedicated to Pope Boniface VIII, Giles of Rome refers to the passage of the *Etymologies* in which Isidore of Seville notes that the word "catholic" is to be translated as "universal." Further on in the same chapter, Giles writes: "Nam quilibet de iure est sub illo, sub quo non existens non potest salutem consequi. In universo itaque orbe debet ecclesia dominare et omnes debent esse sub ea" ("For, as of right, every man is under that without which he cannot obtain salvation. Thus, the Church must have lordship over the whole world, and all men must be under her"). Giles of Rome, *De ecclesiastica potestate* (Aalen: Scientia, 1961), 66. The English translation is from Giles of Rome, *On Ecclesiastical Power: A Medieval Theory of World Government*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 125.

⁵⁸ Among the many studies on the controversies between Sepulveda and Las Casas, see Rolena Adorno, *The Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007); J. A. Fernandez-Santamaria, *The State, War and Peace: Spanish Political Thought in the Renaissance 1516–1559*, 163–236, with a particular focus on Sepulveda's thought; Antony Pagden, "Ius et Factum: Text and Experience in the Writings of Bartolomé de las Casas," in *New World Encounters*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 85–100; Antony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 109–145; Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind Is One: A Study of the Disputation Between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Giné de Sepulveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the American Indians* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University

In the *Apología en favor del libro sobre las justas causas de la guerra* (1550), Sepúlveda posits that Alexander VI gave Ferdinand and Isabel of Castile the authority to conquer the New World and subjugate its natives by force: “negotium dedit et magnopere hortatus est, ut hos Barbaros imperio suo subiicerent, et ad Christi fidem reducendos curarent” (“he entrusted [the king and queen] with the affair and strongly urged them to subject these barbarians to his authority and to attend to their conversion to faith in Christ”).⁵⁹ To the contrary, in his *Apología*, Las Casas argued that such a reading was a corruption of the pontiff’s decree, because Alexander VI had never urged the Spanish monarchs to wage war against the Indians: “Concessit pontifex castellae regibus ut indis principibus, quos ad fidem Christi convertissent, superiores essent illosque sub tutela et ditione sua tamquam subditos haberent. Ut autem bello eos subigerent numquam pontifex iussit vel permisit” (“the Pope granted the kings of Castile the right to set themselves over the Indian rulers whom they had converted to the faith of Christ and to keep them as subjects under their protection and jurisdiction. But the Pope never commanded or permitted them to subjugate these rulers by war”).⁶⁰

A steadfast Thomist and Aristotelian, Sepúlveda also alleged that, because of their barbaric customs and deficient reason, the Indians should be treated as natural slaves and must therefore obey more rational and advanced peoples: “huiusmodi autem gentes, iure naturae, debent humanioribus, prudentioribus, et praestantioribus parere, ut melioribus moribus et institutis gubernentur; sed si admoniti imperium recusant, possunt armis cogi et id bellum erit iustum iure naturae” (“but these people, by law of nature, ought to become more human, more prudent, and more worthy, in order to be governed by better customs and institutions; but if they, forewarned, refuse the empire, they can be compelled by force and thus warfare will be just according to natural law”).⁶¹ The role of the Spaniards in fostering the cause of virtue over vice would correspond to the role played by the Romans in antiquity: “Romani propter gloriam

Press, 1974); and idem, *Aristotle and the American Indians: A Study in Race Prejudice in the Modern World* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1970).

⁵⁹ Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, *Demócrates segundo; Apología en favor del libro sobre las justas causas de la guerra*, ed. and trans. Angel Losada (Pozoblanco: Exmco. Ayuntamiento de Pozoblanco, 1997), 207–209. This work was first published in Rome in 1550.

⁶⁰ Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Apología*, 352; *In defense of the Indians*, 349.

⁶¹ Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, *Apología en favor del libro sobre las justas causas de la guerra*, 197. Sepúlveda’s sources here are Aristotle’s *Politics*, 1274b–1288b and 1301a–1316b; and Aquinas’s *Commentary on Aristotle’s Politics*, liber I, lectio 1.

multa vitia comprimebant, id est, virtutes colebant. Ergo eadem potio-
 reque ratione Hispani possunt Indos in suam ditionem redigere" ("For
 the sake of glory, the Romans crushed many vices; that is, they cultivated
 virtues. Therefore the Spaniards, by the same logic, can bring the Indians
 under their rule").⁶² Las Casas countered by suggesting that Sepúlveda
 should not use the example of "la tiranía de los romanos, para justificar
 la nuestra, denominada conquista" ("the tyranny of the Romans as a jus-
 tification of our tyranny toward the Indians").⁶³ He also highlighted the
 elemental flaw that should have been evident to any observer of ancient
 history and supporter of the legitimacy of a universal monarchy: even at
 the time of its widest expansion, "imperium enim Romanum certis limi-
 tibus distinctum est semperque fuit... non ergo Romani caesares domini
 fuerunt totius orbis" ("the Roman Empire is and has always been marked
 by certain boundaries... the Roman Emperors were not the lords of the
 whole world").⁶⁴ Therefore, as Las Casas goes on to state, "verum tamen est
 Romanum caesarem esse dominum universalem christianorum... asser-
 ere autem Romanum imperatorem legitimum esse totius orbis dominum,
 vanissimum nugamentum est et adulatione decipere imperatores ansaque
 miscendi orbem dissidijs" ("it is true that the Roman Emperor is the uni-
 versal lord of Christians... However, to say that the Roman Emperor is the
 lawful master of the whole world is an utterly vain bit of nonsense and a
 way of deceiving the Emperors by flattery and an occasion for involving
 the world in strife").⁶⁵

The difference between Las Casas's and Sepúlveda's conclusions on
 how to deal with the Indians corresponds to the distinction between the
 notions of the "other" and of the "enemy." Sepúlveda collapsed these two
 categories and implied that, lacking a thorough assimilation within the
 hegemonic ideology he supported, a just war could and should be waged
 against the unbelievers. Las Casas thought of foreigners, however barbaric
 their habits may seem, as fellow human beings endowed with the right
 to govern themselves regardless of whether they were part of the body
 of the Church.⁶⁶ Consequently, Sepúlveda could not but argue in favor
 of the war against the Indians for the sake of their conversion, while Las

⁶² Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, *Apología en favor del libro sobre las justas causas de la guerra*, 197.

⁶³ Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Apología*, 327; *In Defense of the Indians*, 325.

⁶⁴ Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Apología*, 147–48; *In Defense of the Indians*, 151–2.

⁶⁵ Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Apología*, 150; *In Defense of the Indians*, 153.

⁶⁶ See especially chapters 1–6 and 19–20 of Las Casas's *Apología*.

Casas contended that the same objective could be achieved more successfully (and humanely) through missionary work.⁶⁷ Las Casas believed that the Indians should be redeemed by preaching to them, even if such efforts exposed the missionaries to the same risks that Christ's apostles faced when the Church began to grow. In order to convert the Indians to Christianity, the Spanish kingdom should organize peaceful task forces of pious messengers.⁶⁸

A middle ground between the antithetical positions of Sepulveda and Las Casas was outlined by another prominent Spanish jurist and theologian, Francisco de Vitoria, in his works *On the Evangelization of the Unbelievers* (1535) and *On the American Indians* (1539). The legal framework he proposed became the mainstream imperial doctrine with respect to American policies. Vitoria rejected the claim that the legitimacy of the Spanish rule in America rested on the authority of Alexander VI's bulls: "Papa nullam potestatem temporalem habet in barbarous istos, neque in alios infideles" ("The pope has no temporal power over these barbarians, or any other unbelievers").⁶⁹ Furthermore, although he stated that

⁶⁷ In the last chapter of the *Apología*, Las Casas charges Sepulveda with advocating the use of "Mohammedan means," i.e. violence, to propagate the Gospel and proposes a return to the origin of Christianity through the examples of Peter and Paul: "Deinceps vero absit omnis saevitia et bellicus apparatus Machometanis aptior quam Christianis. Mittantur ad eos integris precones, qui Iesum Christum moribus expriment Petrique ac Pauli spiritus referant" ("Finally, let all savagery and apparatus of war, which are better suited to Moslems than Christians be done away with. Let upright heralds be sent to proclaim Jesus Christ in their way of life and to convey the attitudes of Peter and Paul"). Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Apología*, 363; *In Defense of the Indians*, 362.

⁶⁸ In the *Historia de las Indias*, completed in 1559 but published only four decades later, Las Casas explained how his project, originally presented in the 1520s, had gained the support of Mercurino di Gattinara, who favored its promotion within the court of Charles V and helped Las Casas defend himself from the attacks of his opponents, including the historian Gonzales Hernández de Oviedo. For a detailed account of these events, see Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, ed. André Saint-Lu (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1986), vol. 3, 488–522. On Gattinara's involvement in the reorganization of the administration of the Indies, see also Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, *De Orbe Novo Decades*, vol. 2, 699 and 793. Cf. Luigi Avonto, *Mercurino Arborio di Gattinara: documenti inediti per la storia delle Indie Nuove nell'archivio del gran cancelliere di Carlo V*. Ramusio includes Oviedo's unflattering account of Las Casas's efforts in his anthology. See Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Navigazioni e viaggi*, vol. 6, 864–867.

⁶⁹ Francisco de Vitoria, *De Indis et De Iure Belli Relfectiones*, ed. Ernest Nys (Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie institution of Washington, 1917), 243. The English translations of Vitoria's works are from Francisco de Vitoria, *On the American Indians*, in *Political Writings*, ed. Anthony Padgen and Jeremy Lawrence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 258–264, especially 262. On Vitoria, see J. A. Fernandez-Santamaria, *The State, War and Peace: Spanish Political Thought in the Renaissance 1516–1559*, 58–119; and Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, 101–125.

the Spaniards had the right to preach the Christian faith, they could not convert the Indians by force: "Si barbari permittant Hispanos libere et sine impedimento praedicare Evangelium, sive illi recipient fidem sive non, non licet hac ratione intentare illis bellum" ("if the barbarians permit the Spaniards to preach the Gospel freely, then whether or not they accept the faith, it will not be lawful to attempt to impose anything on them by war").⁷⁰

On the other hand, Vitoria asserted that Charles V's soldiers had the right to wage war for the purpose of self-defense and to defend innocents against tyranny: "liceret quidem Hispanis se difendere" ("it would indeed be lawful for the Spaniards to defend themselves"); "Dico etiam quos sine auctoritate Pontificis possunt Hispani prohibere barbarous ab omni nefaria consuetudine et ritu, quia possent defendere innocentes a morte iniusta" ("in lawful defence of the innocent from unjust death, even without the pope's authority, the Spaniards may prohibit the barbarians from practicing any nefarious custom or rite").⁷¹ Vitoria's qualified endorsement of these titles left the legitimacy of the Spanish occupation of the New World on quite unstable grounds. Such precariousness resurfaces in the final pages of *On the American Indians*, where he addresses the question of whether the "barbarians" should hand over the rule of their territories to "wiser men" in the name of a charitable tutelage.⁷² His hesitation about this argument, which he characterizes as "dubious," underscores how his apparently clear legal formulas barely masked the contradictions inherent in the imperialistic rise of Western European countries.

Although I am not aware of any evidence that Tasso had direct access to the writings of these authors, the Estense library certainly offered a wide range of travel literature. It is likely that he read works such as Pietro Martire's *De Orbe Novo Decades*, Ramusio's *Navigazioni e viaggi*, Girolamo Benzoni's *Historia del mondo nuovo* (1565), animated by an anti-Spanish sentiment for the massacres of the Indians, and Antonio Pigafetta's *Viaggio attorno al mondo* (1524), which would provide the blueprint for the initial draft of Carlo and Ubaldo's journey in canto 15 of the *Gerusalemme*

⁷⁰ Francisco de Vitoria, *De Indis et De Iure Belli Relfectiones*, 263; Francisco de Vitoria, *On the American Indians*, 285.

⁷¹ Francisco de Vitoria, *De Indis et De Iure Belli Relfectiones*, 261 and 265; *On the American Indians*, 282 and 288.

⁷² Francisco de Vitoria, *De Indis et De Iure Belli Relfectiones*, 266–67; *On the American Indians*, 290–292.

liberata.⁷³ Hence, Tasso could have hardly remained oblivious to the main concerns related to the conquest of America and the fate of its inhabitants. The interplay among the theological, political, and geographic issues that shaped the world order in the sixteenth century finds a synoptic depiction in Tasso's representation of the crusaders' mission to recover Jerusalem.

Tasso and Empire

In order to probe Tasso's idea of empire, I will start by playing, quite literally, the devil's advocate. In canto 4 of the *Gerusalemme liberata*, the adversary of humankind expresses a predictably polemical view of history that challenges the crusaders' ideology. Satan suggests that it is only because of God's victory in the "war in heaven" that the fallen angels are considered "alme rubelle" ("rebel souls").⁷⁴ He defines the devils' attempt to overthrow the divine Ruler as an "alta impresa" ("lofty enterprise"),⁷⁵ the same words that God uses when He urges the angel Gabriel to stir Goffredo and lead the mission to liberate Jerusalem (*GL* 1.6 and 1.12). Furthermore, during the demonic council in hell, inspired by Marco Girolamo Vida's *Christiad* (1535),⁷⁶ Satan describes the divinely ordered war against the infidels as an imperialistic undertaking to superimpose a Christian rule over the entire world:

Deh! Non vedete omai com'egli tenti
tutte al suo culto richiamar le genti?
Noi trarrem neghittosi i giorni e l'ore,
né degna cura fia che 'l cor n'accenda?
e soffrirem che forza ognor maggiore
il suo popolo fedele in Asia prenda?
e che Giudea soggioghi? e che 'l suo onore,
che 'l nome suo si dilati e stenda?

⁷³ On the interest of the Este family in geographical knowledge, see Theodore J. Cachey, "Maps and Literature in Renaissance Italy," 456–458. On Tasso's use of Pigafetta's history and Tasso's interest in geography, see idem, "Tasso's Navigazione del Nuovo Mondo and the Origins of Columbus Encomium (*GL* 15. 31–32)," *Italica* 69: 3 (Autumn 1992): 326–344; Franco Farinelli, "La Gerusalemme catturata: ipotesi per una geografia del Tasso", in *Torquato Tasso tra letteratura, musica, teatro e arti figurative*, ed. Andrea Buzzoni (Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1985), 75–82.

⁷⁴ *GL* 4.9.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 4.9.

⁷⁶ Marco Girolamo Vida, *Christiad*, trans. by James Gardner (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 1.133–223.

che suoni in altre lingue, e in altri carmi
 si scriva, e incida in novi bronzi e marmi?

Che sian gl'idoli nostri a terra sparsi?
 ch'i nostri altari il mondo a lui converta?
 ch'a lui sospesi i voti, a lui sol arsi
 siano gl'incensi, ed auro e mirra offerta?
 ch'ove a noi tempio non solea serrarsi,
 or via non resti a l'arti nostre aperta?
 che di tant'alme il solito tributo
 ne manchi, e in voto regno alberghi Pluto?⁷⁷

Satan's address has a forceful political gist; he exhorts his comrades to prevent the efforts aimed at expanding God's "name" and "honor" throughout the world and at drawing all peoples to His worship.⁷⁸ These complaints receive further clarification if read together with a passage of the *Giudicio sopra la Conquistata*, in which Tasso describes a poem as a microcosm, pointing out that "il poeta, a guisa di geografo, gli figura quasi la forma dell'imperio e i confini delle provincie soggiogate da gl'infedeli" ("the poet, like a geographer, depicts the shape of the empire and the boundaries of the provinces subjugated by the infidels").⁷⁹ The correlation between poetry and geopolitics seems pertinent also because in Satan's speech, Tasso assigns key roles to arts ("new marbles") and letters ("other tongues") as a means to spread God's glory.

Moreover, Satan laments that the world has been converting his own altars to God, implying some form of continuity between the veneration of pagan deities and Christianity. In stanza 14, we also notice the juxtaposi-

⁷⁷ GL 4.12–14. "Ah, do you not see even now how He is trying to call back all the peoples to His religion?/ Shall we draw out in idleness our days and hours, and shall there be no worthy task to kindle your hearts? And shall we suffer it that His faithful gather in Asia and daily a great power? And that they bring Judaea under the yoke? And that His honor, His name be the more extended and spread abroad? That it resound in other tongues, and be written in other oracles, and cut in new bronzes and marbles?/That our idols be scattered on the ground? That the world convert our altars to Him? That for Him trophies be hung up, for Him alone incense burned, and gold and myrrh offered? That where no temple was wont to be closed against us, now there should be no avenue open to our arts? That the customary tribute of so many souls be withdrawn, and Pluto have his dwelling in an empty kingdom?"

⁷⁸ Sergio Zatti, "Dalla parte di Satana: sull'imperialismo cristiano nella 'Gerusalemme Liberata'," especially 146–148.

⁷⁹ Torquato Tasso, *Giudicio sopra la Conquistata*, in *Prose diverse di Torquato Tasso*, ed. Cesare Guasti (Florence: Le Monnier, 1875), 458. Cf. Franco Farinelli, "La Gerusalemme catturata: ipotesi per una geografia del Tasso," 78.

tion between “voti” (vows) and “voto” (empty):⁸⁰ Satan’s claim to the same vows that God receives suggests that vows fulfilled in the name of the Lord will ultimately void Satan’s kingdom. The same relationship between politics and religion foreshadows the underlying motif of Goffredo’s military campaign and his twofold dimension as both captain and pilgrim: the overlapping of the discharge of his vows and the campaign to liberate the Holy Sepulcher. Whereas Christ’s tomb is at the same time a place of death, rebirth, and salvation, the reign of Pluto hosts a fate of inescapable loss. Whereas for Goffredo and his army, battles and death lead to eternal life, for Solimano and the other Muslims, their demise leaves room only for what the Turkish hero calls “aspra tragedia de lo stato umano:/ i vari assalti e ’l fero orror di morte,/ e i gran giochi del caso e de la sorte” (“the bitter tragedy of the human condition, the various assault and the fierce horror of death, and the mighty casts of fate and fortune”).⁸¹

These dyads (emptiness vs. fulfillment, diabolical vs. divine, authority vs. rebellion, unity vs. multiplicity) help us configure the conflict between the Christians and the Muslims.⁸² However, even if Tasso’s narrative apparently proposes clear dichotomies between two different religions, in the *Gerusalemme liberata* the strife does in fact take place within one entity and one theological system. The body of the Church is divided into many different sects in need of reintegration, since they belong to a Christian and Western code on two counts. First, as Rinaldo’s self-imposed exile and Argillano’s revolt make plain, error and pride are threats that weaken the Christian camp from within. These flaws evoke the “specter” of the Reformation and remind the readers that, as is well known, from the outset of the *Liberata*, Goffredo’s first objective is the submission of “i suoi compagni erranti” (“his wandering companions”) to his authority.⁸³ Second, as noted in the section dedicated to the humanistic views of the Turkish enemy and of Islam as a whole, Muslims were still considered heretics and Mohammad himself was often described as a schismatic who tore the

⁸⁰ On the connection *voto* (vow) *voto* (empty), see Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante’s Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 38–39, with regard to the character of Piccarda Donati in cantos 3–5 of *Paradiso*; and Albert Ascoli, “Liberating the Tomb: Difference and Death in *Gerusalemme Liberata*,” *Annali d’italianistica* 12 (1994): 159–180.

⁸¹ *GL* 20.73.

⁸² On these polarities, see Sergio Zatti, *L’uniforme cristiano e il multiforme pagano*, 9–44; and Ezio Raimondi, *Poesia come retorica* (Florence: Olschki editore, 1980), 131–132. See also Riccardo Brusaghi, *Stagioni della civiltà estense* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1983), 187–222.

⁸³ *GL* 1.1.

unity of the Church. Tasso suggests that even those who would naturally be considered “external enemies” must undergo a repression similar to that of the wandering crusaders. This parallel is confirmed by Goffredo’s address to his troops in canto 1. Shortly after being nominated captain of the Crusader army, Goffredo describes the Muslim lands as “ribellanti provincie” (“rebellious provinces”)⁸⁴ that belonged to Christendom.

The fault lines between orthodoxy and heresy that characterize the *Gerusalemme liberata* are spelled out in the dedicatory letter to Scipione Gonzaga. In it, Tasso introduces the dialogue *De la dignità*, indicating that the forces that hamper the unity of the Church correspond to the “eretica pravità” of the Lutheran heresy and to the “ottomana tirannide.” The passage ends with a reference to the gospel of John that we have seen employed by Ariosto, Gattinara, and Columbus:

E benché molti siano i rivi de l'operazioni e molti i rami pieni de' [...] fatti [della chiesa] e molti i raggi ch'ella semina de la sua dottrina, uno è nondimeno il fonte, uno il tronco fondato sovra tenerissima radice, uno il sole che sparge la chiarissima luce: e l'unità si conserva ne l'origine, e un capo solamente regge molte membra, parte de le quali sono divise da questo corpo per l'eretica pravità, altre per l'ottomana tirannide, la quale usurpa le più belle parti de l'Oriente e del Mezzogiorno. Ma vostra signoria [...] può considerare i mezzi co' quali si possono ricongiungere, accioché uno sia l'ovile e uno il pastore, sì come una è la fede e uno il battesimo.⁸⁵

Besides the overt aspiration to the pursuit of religious unity, I find two aspects of this passage particularly striking: first, Tasso refers to the concord of the Church, not to the foundation of a universal Empire; second, and more important, the author notes that it is the task of Scipione Gonzaga, then Patriarch of Jerusalem, and of unspecified others to consider (“considerare”) what means would better suit the achievement of such a

⁸⁴ Ibid. 1.21.

⁸⁵ Torquato Tasso, *Dialoghi*, vol. 1, 448. “And although many are the channels of operation and many are the branches laden with the affairs [of the Church] and many are the rays of doctrine it diffuses, one, nevertheless is the source, one is the trunk founded above the most tender root, one is the sun that spreads its clearest light: and the unity is conserved in its origin, and one head alone governs its many members, part of which are divided from this body because of heretical wickedness, others because of Ottoman tyranny, which usurps the most beautiful parts of the Orient and of the South. But your eminence [...] may consider the means by which they can be rejoined, so that one is the flock and one is the shepherd, just as one is the faith and one is baptism.” Cf. Sergio Zatti. *L'uniforme cristiano e il multiforme pagano*, 118–121. Tasso began this dialogue in 1580, the year before the publication of the *Gerusalemme liberata*, but he resumed and completed it in 1585.

glorious objective. In other words, Tasso here makes no mention of war as a means of unifying the Church.

From the point of view adopted in the preface of *De la dignità*, however, Tasso's depiction of the Crusade to liberate Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulcher apparently transcends the boundaries of the historical objective of the war and, with the necessary caveats, it can be viewed as a stage in the teleological mission to unify the earth under the standards of Christ. In the *Gerusalemme liberata*, Tasso does support the advance of a unifying, albeit imperfect, process implemented by killing or converting the enemies, or, in the special case of Clorinda, both. On the other hand, as I intend to show in the final pages of this essay, two important exceptions arguably infringe on the poem's movement toward unity and a fresh look at Tasso's *Dialoghi* invites a reconsideration of his ideology.

Mapping Tasso's "geography of the enemy" shows that the *Gerusalemme liberata* covers roughly the entire Eastern hemisphere. This landscape approximately corresponds to the earth as it was known at the time of the First Crusade and as depicted in Ptolemy's *Geographia*: the world Alexander the Great conquered and "civilized," as mentioned in *Il Correggiano*. From North Africa, with the Armenian captain of the Egyptian army Emireno, to Caucasus and Turkey, with Argante and Solimano; from Ethiopia, with the Coptic Clorinda, to Syria and India, with the princess of Antioch Erminia and king Adrasto, Tasso's poem reflects the boundaries of the old empire shaped by the Macedonian king.⁸⁶

Before focusing on Armida, whose garden expands the *Gerusalemme liberata*'s horizon to the new frontiers of Charles V's Empire, it is worth discussing the role of Adrasto. He fights in the final battle as one of Armida's champions, thus becoming the last living emblem of the

⁸⁶ For the historical and religious background of Clorinda's character, see David Quint, *Epic and Empire*, 234–247. On the Copts' relationships with the Catholic Church and Western European countries, see Enrico Cerulli, *Eugenio IV e gli Etiopi al concilio di Firenze nel 1441* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1933); and Alastair Hamilton, *The Copts and the West, 1439–1822: The European Discovery of the Egyptian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9–82. On Clorinda's baptism and Tasso's description of her newly discovered femininity under the metal of her armor, see Sergio Zatti, *L'uniforme cristiano e il multiforme pagano*, 142–143; and Fredi Chiappelli, *Il conoscitore del caos. Una "vis abdita" nel linguaggio tassesco* (Rome: Bulzoni editore, 1981), 56–64. On Solimano as Lucifer, see Ezio Raimondi, *Poesia come retorica*, 116–117. For a comparison of Solimano and Argante, see Giovanni Getto, *Nel mondo della Gerusalemme* (Rome: Bonacci editore, 1977), 73–108. On the relationship between Tancredi and Argante, see Fredi Chiappelli, *Il conoscitore del caos*, 65–76. On the likely classical sources for the character of Argante, see Daniela Foltran, "Dalla 'Liberata' alla 'Conquistata'. Intertestualità virgiliana e omerica nel personaggio di Argante," *Studi Tassiani* 40–41 (1992–1993): 89–134.

chivalric code that places the woman at the center of its universe, the code Rinaldo had previously abandoned. As we roam through the pagan camp following Vafreno's mission of espionage in canto 19, we see Adrasto overwhelmed by Armida's beauty. Tasso's portrait captures his ecstatic gaze on the sorceress and his obliviousness to the collective goal of the war he is fighting: "Vedele incontra il fero Adrasto assiso/ che par ch'occhio non batta e che non spiri,/ tanto da lei pendea, tanto in lei fiso/ pasceva i suoi famelici desiri" ("He sees seated opposite to her the fierce Adrastus, who seems not to bat an eye and not to breathe, so much he hung upon her, so fixed on her he fed his ravenous desire").⁸⁷ This portrait strikingly resembles that of Rinaldo during his erotic servitude in Armida's garden. Much like Adrasto, Rinaldo is transfixed in a narcissistic game: as he stares into Armida's eyes, she delights in her own image reflected in a mirror: "L'uno di servitù, l'altra d'impero/ si gloria, ella in se stessa ed egli in lei" ("The one of them glories in his servitude, the other in her power, she in herself and he in her").⁸⁸

Like Argillano and Svenio, both of whom were killed while pursuing Rinaldo's model,⁸⁹ Adrasto can be considered one of the Christian hero's ill-starred avatars. In the last lines that the king of India utters in the poem, he challenges Rinaldo, proclaiming his devotion to Armida in religious terms. In the chivalric cosmos the beloved lady becomes a deity ("nume") to whom the knight must pledge his vows: "Or solverò de la vendetta i voti/ co 'l tuo capo al mio nume. Omai facciamo/ di valor, di furor qui paragone,/ tu nemico d'Armida ed io campione" ("Now with your head to my deity I shall discharge my vows of vengeance. Now let us make right here our proof of valor, of fury—Armida's enemy you, and I her champion").⁹⁰ Adrasto's sudden death unsurprisingly keeps him from discharging his vows. While the futility of his oath elicits a wry smile from the reader, Rinaldo's dreadful blow instills a chilling terror in Solimano.⁹¹

Adrasto's demise suggests the temporary suppression of the chivalric values he embodies and, given that he held a kingdom toward the

⁸⁷ GL 19.68.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 16.21

⁸⁹ GL 8.36 and 9.87. On Argillano's revolt, see David Quint, *Epic and Empire*, 214–234.

⁹⁰ GL 20.102.

⁹¹ Ibid. 20.103–104. It is worth underscoring Tasso's insistence on the word "voti," to which I referred at the beginning of this essay. Adrasto's vows strike the reader for their vainness and their obvious opposition to Goffredo's pledge to liberate Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulcher.

"borders of the dawn" ("i confin de l'aurora"),⁹² it signals the advance of Christian military might to the eastward furthest boundary of the earth. His death also serves as a prelude to the reconciliation between Rinaldo and Armida, which although hinting to the sorceress's conversion, does in fact leave the door open to the very chivalric code it apparently suppresses. Her formulaic submission, "Ecco l'ancilla tua" ("Behold your handmaid"),⁹³ mirrors Rinaldo's pledge to return Armida to her kingdom and to become her "campione e servo,"⁹⁴ rather than indicating her metamorphosis into an "ancilla Dei," as the echo of the Virgin Mary's acceptance of the annunciation implies.⁹⁵

Armida, whose character is inextricably tied to romance and error, first appears in canto 4, where she succeeds in sowing discord among the crusaders and in diverting some of the Christian knights from their mission to conquer Jerusalem. They follow her to a castle by the Dead Sea only to become her prisoners. Rinaldo will eventually set all of them free, but will remain entangled when Armida falls in love with him and the two set sail for one of the Fortunate Isles (the Canary Islands) in the Atlantic Ocean.⁹⁶ For the Crusade to succeed, Rinaldo must be rescued from his pleasant captivity. Under the guidance of the magician Ascalona and of Fortuna, Ubaldo and Carlo rapidly sail across the Mediterranean Sea. The two Christian knights become witnesses to the ruins of history, from Alexandria to Carthage, and to the frailty of empires: "Muoiuno le città,

⁹² Ibid. 19.125.

⁹³ Ibid. 20.136.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 20.134.

⁹⁵ On the issue of romance and Armida's (faux) conversion, see JoAnn Cavallo, "Tasso's Armida and the Victory of Romance," 96–109; and Walter Stephens, "Saint Paul Among the Amazons: Gender and Authority in *Gerusalemme liberata*," in *Discourse of Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Walter Stephens (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1989), 169–200. For the relevance of this episode in relation to the issues of the conversion and colonization of the New World, see Jane Tylus, "Reasoning Away Colonialism: Tasso and the Production of the *Gerusalemme Liberata*," *South Central Review* 10:2 (1993): 100–114. It is also worth noting that, although we can suppose that Erminia will follow Tancredi as an "ancilla errante" ("handmaiden" *GL* 19.101) and possibly embrace the Christian faith, she exits the stage with no trace of conversion and an allusive command to her ailing patient: "Salute avrai, prepara il guiderdone." / Ed al suo capo, il grembo indi suppone" ("You shall have your health: make ready the fee." And then she makes of her lap a support for his head"). *GL* 19.114.

⁹⁶ On the literary *topos* of the Fortunate Isles, see Theodore J. Cachey, *Le Isole Fortunate. Appunti di storia della letteratura italiana* (Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1995), especially 123–221. On Armida's garden, see Angelo Bartlett Giamatti, *Earthly Paradise and Renaissance Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 179–210; Sergio Zatti, *L'uniforme cristiano e il multiforme pagano*, 45–90; Fredi Chiappelli, *Il conoscitore del caos. Una "vis abdita" nel linguaggio tassesco*, 182–197.

muoiono i regni,/ copre i fasti e le pompe arena ed erba,/ e l'uom d'esser mortal par che si sdegni:/ oh nostra mente cupida e superba!" ("Cities perish, kingdoms perish; sand and grass cover their monuments and displays; and it seems that man would be restive at being mortal; oh our greedy and aspiring minds!").⁹⁷ Carlo and Ubaldo eventually move beyond the pillars of Hercules, following the tracks of Dante's Ulysses: "ma quei segni sprezzò ch'egli [Ercole] prescrisse,/ di veder vago e di saper, Ulisse" ("but Ulysses, eager to see and to learn, scorned those boundaries that he [Hercules] prescribed").⁹⁸

As already noted, the stanzas intended to be included and then omitted from canto 15 of the *Gerusalemme liberata* were fashioned after Pigafetta's account of Magellan's circumnavigation of the world.⁹⁹ This decision deprives the poem of a deeper excursion into remote territories, but does not erase the traces of Tasso's interest in the geographic discoveries. Before Carlo and Ubaldo arrive at Armida's labyrinth, Fortuna prophesies that the Christian faith will prevail over the "barbaric" laws and the cults of the diverse peoples who inhabit the "mondo occulto" ("hidden world").¹⁰⁰

Gli soggiunse colei: "Diverse bande
diversi riti ed abiti e favelle:
altri adora le belve, altri la grande
comune madre, il sole altri e le stelle;
v'è chi d'abominevol vivande
le mense ingombra scelerate e felle.
E 'n somma ognun che 'n qua da calpe siede
barbaro è di costume ed empio di fede."
"Dunque" a lei [Fortuna] replicava il cavaliere
"quel Dio che scese ad illuminar le carte
vuol ogni raggio ricoprir del vero
a questa che del mondo è sì gran parte?"
"No," rispose ella "anzi la fé di Piero
fiavi introdotta ed ogni civil arte;

⁹⁷ GL 15.20.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 15.25. Cf. *Inferno* 26.90–142. On the presence of Dante's Ulysses in canto 15 of the *Liberata*, see Piero Boitani, *L'ombra di Ulisse. Figure di un mito* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992), 60–86; Matteo Residori, "Colombo e il volo d'Ulisse: una nota sul XV della *Liberata*," *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, ser. 3, vol. 22, no. 3 (1992): 931–942; and Walter Stephens, "Tasso as Ulysses," in *Sparks and Seeds: Medieval Literature and Its Afterlife: Essays in Honor of John Freccero*, ed. Dana Stewart and Alison Cornish (Binghamton: Medieval and Early Modern Studies, 2000), 209–239.

⁹⁹ Cf. Theodore J. Cachey, "Tasso's Navigazione del Nuovo Mondo and the Origins of Columbus Encomium (GL 15. 31–32)," 331–340.

¹⁰⁰ GL 15.27.

né già sempre sarà che la via lunga
questi da' vostri popoli disgiunga."

Tempo verrà che fian d'Ercole i segni
favola vile a i naviganti industri,
e i mar riposti, or senza nome, e i regni
ignoti ancor tra voi saranno illustri.
Fia che 'l più ardito allor di tutti i legni
quanto circonda il mar circonda e lustri,
e la terra misuri, immensa mole,
vittorioso ed emulo del sole.

Un uom de la Liguria avrà ardimento
a l'incognito corso esporsi in prima;
né 'l minaccievol mar, né il dubbio clima,
né s'altro di periglio o di spavento
più grave e formidabile or si stima,
faran che 'l generoso entro a i divieti
d'Abila angusti l'alta mente accheti.

Tu spiegherai, Colombo, a un nuovo polo
lontane sì le fortunate antenne,
ch'a pena seguirà con gli occhi il volo
la fama ch'a mille occhi e mille penne.
Canti ella Alcide e Bacco, e di te solo
basti a i posteri tuoi ch'alquanto accenne,
ché quel poco darà lunga memoria
di poema dignissima e d'istoria.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 15.28–32. "She continued to him: 'Divers groups have divers customs and dress and speech: some worship beasts, some the great universal Mother; others the sun and the stars; there is one that loads its wicked and cruel tables with abominable repast: and in sum, every place that sits between here and Calpe is barbarous in customs, impious in faith.'/ 'Is it then the will (replied the knight to her—Fortune) of that God who descended to illuminate the pages that every ray of the truth be concealed for this that is so large part of the world?' "No (she answered); on the contrary, the faith of Peter will be introduced there, and every civilizing art: nor will it always be that the long voyage disjoins these people from our own./ The time will come that the pillars of Hercules will be a mere fable to the busy sailors; and sheltered seas without a name and realms as yet unknown will be renowned among you. Then will it be that the boldest of all barks encompasses and brings to light whatever the ocean encompasses, and takes the measure of the earth, a mighty mass, victorious, and emulous of the sun./ A man of Liguria will have the daring first to set himself on the unknown course: and not the menacing howling of the wind, nor inhospitable seas, nor doubtful clime, nor anything else that now may be esteemed more formidable and filled with fear or danger will make the pride spirit content his lofty mind within the narrow prescriptions of Abyla./ You, Columbus, will spread your fortunate sails so far toward an unknown pole that Fame (that has a thousand eyes and a thousand wings) will scarcely follow with her eyes your flight. Let her sing of Alcides and Bacchus, and of you let it be enough that she only give some hint for your posterity: for that little will give you a lasting memorial most worthy of Poetry and History."

Fortuna's *ex post facto* prediction lays out for Ubaldo and Carlo the ideology that led Columbus to embark on his voyage and the European powers to explore new territories and spread the Christian faith in America. Since Tasso's poem celebrates the Genoese Admiral's audacity, claiming that his journey will be engraved in the parchments of poetry and history, it is tempting to see the violation of Armida's garden as the subjugation of the New World by force and that the *Gerusalemme liberata* merely rehashes the most ardent claims endorsing the legitimacy of the Spanish conquests.¹⁰² But at least three signs contradict this interpretation.

First, the two crusaders are explicitly instructed not to use their swords in their effort to rescue Rinaldo: "Già Carlo il ferro stringe e 'l serpe assale, / ma l'altro grida a lui: 'Che fai? Che tente? / per isforzo di man, con arme tale / vincer avisi il difensor serpente?'" ("Already Charles is drawing his steel and is attacking the serpent; but the other shouts to him: 'What are you doing? What are you trying to do? By manual strength, with weapons such as that, do you think to overcome the guardian snake?").¹⁰³ If the snake and the other hurdles Carlo and Ubaldo must overcome may not be defeated with human weapons, Tasso arguably implies that warfare does not provide the means to vanquish the forms of vice that inhabit Armida's island, be they sensual pleasures or any other form of intellectual temptations. Furthermore, at least twice in his *Dialoghi*, Tasso expresses positions about the status of the American Indians that are far more congruent with those of Las Casas and Vitoria than with Sepulveda's. In *De la dignità*, while discussing the issue of universal nobility in light of Aristotle's thought, Tasso writes:

A. B. Dunque sarà da lui [Aristotle] considerata quella [nobiltà] ancora de' Turchi e de' Tartari e de' Persiani, non pur quella de' Germani e de' gli Spagnuoli.

A. F. Sarà mio parere.

A. B. E se fra gli Indiani di nuovo ritrovati è qualche popolo il qual viva come già viveva la gente di Saturno, de la sua nobiltà potrà similmente ragionare il nostro filosofo.

A. F. Senza fallo.

A. B. Se fra loro dunque fosse alcuna stirpe che [...] vivesse de' frutti de le sue terre, secondo i costumi de' suoi paesi liberamente, e 'n tutte l'operazioni si dimostrasse non solo liberale ma temperante e forte e giusta, credereste voi che fosse nobile?

¹⁰² Sergio Zatti, "Tasso e il nuovo mondo," 501–21.

¹⁰³ *GL* 15.49. See also *ibid.* 14.73.

A. F. Crederei.

A. B. Né, perché fosse senza titolo e senza l'altre civili dignità, vi parrebbe ignobile.

A. F. Non mi parrebbe.¹⁰⁴

Tasso's stance on the legitimacy of the barbarians' government in *Il Nifo overo del piacere* shows a similar approach to a slightly different subject. In the context of a conversation between Agostino Nifo and Cesare Gonzaga on questions of reason and natural law, Tasso writes:

A. N. Ma voi dovete ricordarvi che [Aristotile] fra le specie del regno pone tra' barbari alcune tirannidi legittime, le quali, benché sian giuste per legge, nondimeno per natura non deono esser riputate giuste.

C. G. Me ne sovviene; ma non estimo ch'ad Aristotele potesse parer giusto assolutamente l'imperio di Serse o di Dario, tuttoch'i padri e gli avoli fossino stati grandissimi re.

A. N. I barbari adunque dovrebbero sempre obbedire, né sarebbe giusto che i Tartari o gli Etiopi o gli Indiani comandassero a' migliori di loro, ove i nemici non perdessero ogni virtù ed essi l'incontra l'acquistassero. Ma divenendo migliori, ragionevolmente potrebbero comandare, e giusto sarebbe il loro imperio.¹⁰⁵

Both passages indicate that Tasso held a relatively more modern world-view than is traditionally suggested. In *Il Nifo*, his consideration of Aristotle's claim on the "natural slaves," on which many of the arguments in favor of the colonization were founded, leaves room for the independent government of the Indians. The caveat ("divenendo migliori, ragionevolmente potrebbero comandare") that Tasso issues to his concession to

¹⁰⁴ Torquato Tasso, *Dialoghi*, vol. 1, 456. "A.B. Therefore Aristotle will also consider the nobility of the Turks and the Tartars and the Persians, not only that of the Germans and the Spaniards./ A.F. I agree./ A.B. And if among the newly discovered Indians there is some people that lives as they lived in the age of Saturn, our philosopher would draw the same conclusions regarding its nobility./ A.F. Without question./ A.B. If among them there were some stock that [...] lived freely off the fruits of their lands, according to their local customs, whose behavior appeared to be not only generous but temperate and valiant and just, would you believe it to be noble?/ A.F. I would indeed./ A.B. And you would not consider it lowly despite its want of a title and other marks of civil dignity./ A.F. I would not."

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, 270. "A.N. But you must remember that [Aristotle] includes among the legitimate kingdoms certain barbaric tyrannies which, though just by law, ought not to be reputed just by nature./ C.G. I remember that; but I doubt that Aristotle would consider the empires of Serse and Dario as intrinsically just, although their fathers had been excellent kings./ A.N. The barbarians therefore should always obey, nor would it be just that the Tartars or the Ethiopians or the Indians ruled over those who are their superiors, unless their enemies were to lose all virtue and they themselves were to acquire it. For by becoming more able, they could rule legitimately, and their authority would be just."

the inhabitants of the New World is met in the passage from *De la dignità*, where he unequivocally states that some of the Indians (“il qual viva come viveva la gente di Saturno”) share the very same civic virtues (“temperante, forte e giusta”) that define nobility among European nations. As noted above, the use of the myth of the Golden Age was not at all uncommon. It reflected the travelers’ astonishment at the beautifully temperate climate they found in the Tropics, which in antiquity erroneously defined the boundaries of an utterly inhospitable region. This Aristotelian and subsequently Augustinian misconception was not irrelevant from a political standpoint,¹⁰⁶ because the inhabitants of the most temperate territories were considered the best suited to rule. As a 1571 letter to Ercole de’ Contrari attests, the twenty-seven year old Tasso examined the comparison between France and Italy from the same standpoint,¹⁰⁷ giving us no reason to believe that he would not apply the same principles when reflecting on the populations of the new continent.

If we add to these cues the fact that in the final stanzas of the *Gerusalemme liberata* Goffredo decides to spare Altamoro without demanding that his Persian enemy convert: “Grida egli a’ suoi: ‘Cessate; e tu, barone,/ renditi, io son Goffredo, a me prigionero” (“He shouts to his troops: ‘Give

¹⁰⁶ See Aristotle, *Politics* 1327b 24–34; and Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 16.9. On the importance of this issue for the geopolitics of the discoveries, see Nicolás Wey Gómez, *The Tropics of Empire: Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies*, especially 79–84 and 119–123.

¹⁰⁷ “Ma le regioni di mezzo, per la temperie dell’aria, fanno gli uomini non deboli e paurosi, come quelle di mezzogiorno, né temerari e di ingegno rozzo e materiale come le settentrionali; ma, con nobile mescolamento, prudenti e forti di mano e d’ingegno, e al guerreggiare e al filosofare disposti” (“But the intermediate regions, because of their temperate climate, do not make men weak and fearful, such as those of the south, nor reckless and uncouth, such as those of the north; but, through a noble confluence, render them prudent and strong in mind and body, and well-disposed for warfare and philosophy”). “Lettera del signor Torquato Tasso nella quale paragona L’Italia alla Francia,” in Torquato Tasso, *Tre scritti politici*, ed. Luigi Firpo (Turin: Utet, 1980), 97–125, especially 102. On this letter, see Luigi Firpo, “Il pensiero politico di Torquato Tasso,” in *Sudi in onore di Gino Luzzato* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1950), 176–197, especially 182–187. It is also worth noting that, as Tasso knew well, in cantare 25 of Luigi Pulci’s *Morgante* (completed in 1483), the demon Astarotte “predicts” the exploration of the lands beyond Hercules’s pillars, expressing his disdain for the false opinions of the ancients (Luigi Pulci, *Morgante* 25.227–244). This fascinating section of the work, which is often attributed to Pulci’s interaction with Toscanelli and other humanists such as Lorenzo Bonincontri in Florence, is also characterized by a remarkable theological discussion on the salvation of the inhabitants of those territories which were not reached by the Gospels. Because of the apparent anomaly of such a discourse within Pulci’s poem, Torquato Tasso (erroneously) suggested that Astarotte’s speech had in fact been written by Marsilio Ficino. See Torquato Tasso, *Lettere Poetiche*, ed. Carla Molinari (Parma: Ugo Guanda Editore, 1995), 316–317.

over; and you, baron, yield yourself my prisoner; I am Godfrey"),¹⁰⁸ the notion that Tasso's epic flatly affirms the ideology of a Catholic, i. e. universal, empire appears less than convincing. In fact, the tragic quality of the fight for Jerusalem, the rivers of blood on her streets as the rage of battle ebbs, and Goffredo's fulfillment of his vow while he still wears his gore-tarnished cloak point to a less confident assessment of man's ability to achieve an enduring form of world order.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

Despite the signs of a comparatively tolerant worldview, Tasso never collapsed the differences between the crusaders and their enemies, rejecting Satan's contention in canto 4 that no difference exists between vows to God and to the archfiend. Such a distinction clarifies how these politico-theological forces share a common ground, war, but lead to opposite ends. Unless guided by a metaphysical principle that anchors the notions of good and evil to an ethical bedrock, any political or military endeavor is bound to reflect the will to power that, from Satan's point of view in the *Liberata*, characterizes God's supremacy. As was the case in Pius II's epistle to Mehmed II, the line between foes in the *Gerusalemme liberata* is primarily theological,¹¹⁰ as Goffredo's opening speech to his fellow soldiers suggests: "Non edifica quei che vuol gl'imperi/ su fondamenti fabbricar mondani/... / ma ben move ruine, ond'egli oppresso/ sol costruito un sepolcro abbia a se stesso" ("He who wants to rear princedoms does not build them on earthly foundations...but rather he shakes down ruins, overwhelmed by which he has only built himself a tomb").¹¹¹ Yet, even within this religious framework, Tasso does not obscure the tragic precariousness that looms behind even the noblest human achievement.

¹⁰⁸ GL 20.140. It is worth adding that Tasso's decision to end his work with a note of clemency establishes a distance between his poem and the tragic conclusion of the *Aeneid*, where Turnus is ruthlessly slain by the angered Aeneas (*Aeneid* 12.945–952), and of the *Orlando furioso*, where Rodomonte is killed by Ruggiero (*Orlando furioso* 46.140). Cf. Walter Stephens, "Saint Paul Among the Amazons: Gender and Authority in *Gerusalemme liberata*," 175–177.

¹⁰⁹ GL 20.143–144.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Walter Stephens, "Metaphor, Sacrament, and the Problem of Allegory" in *Gerusalemme Liberata*, *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* 4 (1991): 217–247; and Decio Pierantozzi, "La *Gerusalemme liberata* come poema religioso," *Studi Tassiani* 32 (1984): 29–42.

¹¹¹ GL 1.25.

While the struggle against evil is one worth engaging, Armida's conversion *manqué*, Carlo and Ubaldo's prohibition to use their swords, and Altamoro's survival indicate that political and military victories cannot fulfill the objective of religious unity. True peace for the Christian captain will only be realized when his wish "il mortal laccio sciolgasi ormai" ("let the mortal coil be loosed") is granted and he can finally become a "cittadin de la città celeste" ("citizen of the Heavenly City").¹¹²

The limitations of political achievements become more conspicuous if we compare the enthusiastic portrait of Columbus with Goffredo's dream in the canto of the *Gerusalemme liberata* that immediately precedes it. In the footsteps of a long literary tradition that includes the likes of Scipio and Dante, the captain of the crusader army ascends to the heavens and sees the earth as a "picciolo cerchio" and the ocean as a "bassa palude e breve stagno" ("a low swamp and a narrow pond").¹¹³ As Tasso narrates what, according to the prevailing ideology of his time, should be the holiest war that a Christian could fight, he is also the Renaissance poet who echoes Dante's voice in the heaven of Saturn most lucidly: even in the most righteous epic, heroes come into sight as shadowy and dusty miniatures acting in a bloody pantomime over what Dante defined "l'aiuola che ci fa tanto feroci" ("the little threshing floor that makes us so fierce").¹¹⁴

¹¹² Ibid. 14.7.

¹¹³ Ibid. 14. 10. See also the amplification of Goffredo's dream in canto 20 of the *Gerusalemme Conquistata*. On Goffredo's dream, see Giovanna Scianatico, "L'idea del perfetto principe." *Utopia e storia nella scrittura del Torquato Tasso* (Naples: Edizioni Sicientifiche Italiane, 1998), 29–63; and idem, *L'arme pietose. Studio sulla Gerusalemme Liberata* (Venice: Marsilio, 1990), 193–225. See also Erminia Ardissino, "L'aspra tragedia." *Poesia e sacro in Torquato Tasso* (Florence: Olschki Editore, 1996). On the *Gerusalemme Conquistata*, see Matteo Residori, *Idea del poema: studio sulla Gerusalemme Conquistata di Torquato Tasso* (Pisa: Scuola Normale di Pisa, 2004), 75–161.

¹¹⁴ *Paradiso* 22.151.

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